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University History Series

Vernon Armand DeMars

A LIFE IN ARCHITECTURE: INDIAN DANCING, MIGRANT HOUSING,
TELESIS, DESIGN FOR URBAN LIVING, THEATER, TEACHING

With an Introduction by
Francis Violich

Interviews Conducted by
Suzanne B. Riess
in 1988-1989

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Vernon DeMars, photographed at home, 1991.

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Introduction by Francis Violich, Professor of City Planning and Landscape Architecture, Emeritus, UC Berkeley.

Interviewed by Suzanne B. Riess, 1988-1989, for the University History Series. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

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PREFACE

When President Robert Gordon Sproul proposed that the Regents of the University of California establish a Regional Oral History Office, he was eager to have the office document both the University's history and its impact on the state. The Regents established the office in 1954, "to tape record the memoirs of persons who have contributed significantly to the history of California and the West," thus embracing President Sproul's vision and expanding its scope.

Administratively, the new program at Berkeley was placed within the library, but the budget line was direct to the Office of the President. An Academic Senate committee served as executive. In the more than three decades that followed, the program has grown in scope and personnel, and has taken its place as a division of The Bancroft Library, the University's manuscript and rare books Library. The essential purpose of the office, however, remains as it was in the beginning: to document the movers and shakers of California and the West, and to give special attention to those who have strong and often continuing links to the University of California.

The Regional Oral History Office at Berkeley is the oldest such entity within the University system, and the University History series is the Regional Oral History Office's longest established series of memoirs. That series documents the institutional history of the University. It captures the flavor of incidents, events, personalities, and details that formal records cannot reach. It traces the contributions of graduates and faculty members, officers and staff in the statewide arena, and reveals the ways the University and the community have learned to deal with each other over time.

The University History series provides background in two areas. First is the external setting, the ways the University stimulates, serves, and responds to the community through research, publication, and the education of generalists and specialists. The other is the internal history that binds together University participants from a variety of eras and specialties, and reminds them of interests in common. For faculty, staff, and alumni, the University History memoirs serve as reminders of the work of predecessors, and foster a sense of responsibility toward those who will join the University in years to come. For those who are interviewed, the memoirs present a chance to express perceptions about the University and its role, and offer one's own legacy of memories to the University itself.

The University History series over the years has enjoyed financial support from a variety of sources. These include alumni groups and

individuals, members of particular industries and those involved in specific subject fields, campus departments, administrative units and special groups, as well as grants and private gifts. Some examples follow.

Professor Walton Bean, with the aid of Verne A. Stadtman, Centennial Editor, conducted a number of significant oral history memoirs in cooperation with the University's Centennial History Project (1968). More recently, the Women's Faculty Club supported a series on the club and its members in order to preserve insights into the role of women in the faculty, in research areas, and in administrative fields. Guided by Richard Erickson, the Alumni Association has supported a variety of interviews, including those with Ida Sproul, wife of the President; athletic coaches Clint Evans and Brutus Hamilton; and alumnus Jean Carter Witter.

The California Wine Industry Series reached to the University campus by featuring Professors Maynard A. Amerine and William V. Cruess, among others. Regent Elinor Heller was interviewed in the series on California Women Political Leaders, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities; her oral history included an extensive discussion of her years with the University through interviews funded by her family's gift to the University.

On campus, the Friends of the East Asiatic Library and the UC Berkeley Foundation supported the memoir of Elizabeth Huff, the library's founder; the Water Resources Center provided for the interviews of Professors Percy H. McGaughey, Sidney T. Harding, and Wilfred Langelier. Their own academic units and friends joined to contribute for such memoirists as Dean Ewald T. Grether, Business Administration; Professor Garff Wilson, Public Ceremonies; Regents' Secretary Marjorie Woolman; and Dean Morrough P. O'Brien, Engineering.

As the class gift on their 50th Anniversary, the Class of 1931 endowed an oral history series titled "The University of California, Source of Community Leaders." These interviews will reflect President Sproul's vision by encompassing leadership both state- and nationwide, as well as in special fields, and will include memoirists from the University's alumni, faculty members and administrators. The first oral history focused on President Sproul himself. Interviews with 34 key individuals dealt with his career from student years in the early 1900s through his term as the University's 11th President, from 1930-1958.

More recently, University President David Pierpont Gardner has shown his interest in and support for oral histories, as a result of his own views and in harmony with President Sproul's original intent. The University History memoirs continue to document the life of the University and to link its community more closely -- Regents, alumni, faculty, staff members, and students. Through these oral history

interviews, the University keeps its own history alive, along with the flavor of irreplaceable personal memories, experiences, and perceptions.

A full list of completed memoirs and those in process in the series is included in this volume.

The Regional Oral History Office is under the the direction of Willa K. Baum and under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

9 November 1987
Regional Oral History Office
University of California
Berkeley, California

Harriet Nathan, Series Director
University History Series

Willa K. Baum, Division Head
Regional Oral History Office

INTRODUCTION--by Francis Violich

The Image

To introduce and construct an image of Vernon DeMars, the man of unique dimensions who speaks to you from the fascinating pages that follow, is risky and rewarding. A reliable reflection of his deeper qualities may be difficult to reveal accurately in view of the great breadth and diversity of achievements over a lifetime set forth in the Table of Contents. On the other hand, to distill the inner motivation and creativity that has nourished his professional achievements allows us to synthesize events that span most of our century, and gain meaning from them. Surely, as you will see, Vernon DeMars stands forth both as a product of his changing times and a contributor to the shaping of its environment.

In this light, then, and because of my own long and varied relationship to Vernon, the image I shall attempt to construct will be based not so much on the great array of his design achievements, but on the main themes and personal qualities that dominated his thinking and incrementally made him the professional he became. It will be fruitful for the reader of the oral history to watch for the interaction between his personal growth and the services rendered society, a process that enriched both and led to his uniqueness as an architect.

Vernon's quality of being one-of-a-kind serves as a keystone in this image construction we are undertaking, distinguishing him from others among us who started our careers in the environmental fields early in the century here in the West. But what set him apart? Central to the source of his distinction we find a diversity of themes that have threaded their way through his career and, importantly, engaged his interest to a consistent depth of involvement for each. From youth onward he pursued with hard work the areas that interested him, and he finished what he started. This became a lifetime pattern. We see him as an Eagle Scout interested in American Indians of the Southwest, a young architect housing displaced farm workers from the Dust Bowl, a naval officer in Puerto Rico, an instructor and professor at MIT and Berkeley, an urban designer for the University of California's Student Center, an engaged member of the community of "Big Names in Architecture," and finally, in retirement, leading the movement to rid San Francisco of the elevated freeway and replace it with an enlightened Ferry Building Plaza.

Once involved, his notable energy, his broad and lively personal concern for the relationship between people and the settings in which they live, merges with his ability to envision ways for its fulfillment through design of the environment seen as a whole. The image I am building becomes that of a man motivated more by a kind of personally-inspired and yet pragmatic idealism than by the restricted and mechanistic world of successfully running an architectural practice.

Young Turks

These thoughts grow out of origins we share, and a close personal and professional relationship begun in the early 1930s when we overlapped a few years at the University of California. We were both born in San Francisco--though he grew up in Oakland--and this gave us a broad geographic spread and strong identity with the commanding presence of the Bay Area as a whole. This common beginning later provided fertile ground, for us and others of our generation, as a regional basis for architectural, urban design and planning approaches. Furthermore, between the two of us we had built an interdisciplinary outlook while embarking on our fields. His work in architecture looked to native sources. This was complemented by my own undergraduate work in landscape architecture, inspired by the appealing qualities of the Bay Area's hills and valleys, shorelines, and ridgetops still in a pristine condition. The early works of a civic nature--the Civic Center itself, Market Street and the Ferry Building, the great 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, Lake Merritt in Oakland--shifted my interests toward city planning, which I studied at Harvard and MIT in the 1940s.

Both of us endured the Depression, and from this came the social dimension of our fields. Vernon and I found ourselves working together with others from the overlapping disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, site planning, engineering, all highly stimulated by the programs of Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration. Here were exciting directions that offered a breakaway from much of our training, here we could dedicate our talents to a social purpose. And I well remember the concern expressed by our respective parents that we were not pursuing traditional practice designing middle class homes and gardens for the then-emerging suburbs of San Francisco and Oakland.

So, in short, we found ourselves forming part of a substantial group of Young Turks, all "made of the same stuff," exhilarated by the unique qualities of the Bay Area and California in general, where our families had only come a generation before. Little did we recognize that we were starting out at a time when fresh approaches to architecture, city planning, and landscape architecture were being called for worldwide. We knew we held cultural interests in common and a zest for the

Mediterranean qualities of our environment, a heritage of music, dance, art, books, and the Europe of our forebears, which Vernon and many of us came to know firsthand in travel before World War II.

This brief but fertile period of the late 1930s, the times and circumstances of which moved us considerably to the political left, held all the ingredients for the founding with our colleagues of the group called Telesis. And here, in Telesis, in 1939 and 1940, is where Vernon played a major role with his ability to conceptualize and to portray in vivid pen sketches the ideal communities and city cores we had in mind, in contrast with the urban and social deterioration that had been accepted as progress.

Out of Telesis, this group with its slogan-definition of "progress intelligently planned," grew the University of California's College of Environmental Design. And in due time, with T.J. Kent taking the lead, Vernon, myself, and others of the Young Turks, under guidance from William Wurster and Catherine Bauer, and inspiration from Lewis Mumford--all of whom we knew--found ourselves faculty members there in the 1950s.

Fabric of Life Work

In seeking to construct this image of Vernon DeMars, let me introduce a metaphor that may crystalize the essence of his qualities. As a city planner I have learned that the distinctive character, let us say the "fabric" of a city, is woven out of the turning points in its own physical development over time. A parallel can be drawn to the way that a person born with a kind of creativity sensitive to the complex field of environmental design develops a uniqueness through a variety of experiences. One might say of San Francisco that richness of natural site and the breadth of cultural history that built the city has brought forth a range of qualities now woven into its fabric that leaves us with a unique--even irresistible--identity.

For our metaphor then, what are the warp and weft, the main themes, in DeMars' make-up, those given and those acquired through life experiences? What constitutes the framework and textures of his life work? First, his sense of connectedness and belonging to the California he grew up in, particularly the San Francisco Bay Area, established in him a concern for the relatedness of all people to environments to be designed and built. For example, in designing housing for the settlements of the Farm Security Administration his response to need was humane and empathetic, and he understood the need to design for such concerns as climate control, family privacy, garden plots, self-sufficiency, and for community areas and facilities for collective living.

His cultural breadth had its origins in his continued awareness of the French Canadian background of the DeMars family, his mother's origin in the Ozarks of Arkansas, and the pioneering role that family played in Montana and later in their turn-of-the-century move to San Francisco. He carries a sense of complex heritage proudly. Much of his childhood was spent in the company of independent-minded women, aunts, grandmothers, and he was given the run of the land. Thus he came to experience fully the extent and shape of the places he lived in.

His curiosity, and the diversity of his creative interests, and the depth of his participation in each of them, led to a third facet in the weave of his distinctive fabric. Through very early contact with the American Indian culture through Scouting in Oakland, he went all the way into the culture of the Pueblo and Hopi Indians. He learned from them their songs and dances, becoming a dancer, performing with them in New Mexico. He learned their traditional myths and social organization, and observed their adaptation to modern times. He began to see how they viewed their land, and the time he spent doing measurements of Anasazi ruins at the Twin Caves site in northern Arizona allowed him to stretch his vision into their past. He made this his own. Bridging two cultures, he performed in public in the Bay Area, with great professionalism. This led to folk dancing that overlapped with the Okies, and designing of gathering places in the FSA program.

Out of this compounding of understanding of culture and tradition and performance grew an interest in theater in general. Vernon's special kind of drive and devotion gave spirit to his designing Zellerbach Hall and especially the Playhouse--he saw Sproul Plaza as theater itself. The successful student center might not have come into being were it not for Vernon's zeal for theater. And in a sense that interest led to his finding a life mate in Betty Bates, herself absorbed in dance, theater, costume design. That was indeed a happy union and one that offered a very special facet to our image of Vernon--indeed, we can say, inseparable from it.

The fabric is further textured by the world of nature that he saw as an integral context for buildings. This grew out of experiencing the California landscape of our early years, before automobiles and urbanization stole its pristine qualities. His knowledge of architectural history was generated by the inspiring and richly-detailed study in the context of the Beaux Arts architectural education of the late 1920s that he describes with such pleasure. Travels in Europe before the airplane and mass tourism, gave him a sense of continuity and political context in architectural character. Yet at the same time Lewis Mumford was bringing to all of us his view of the history of urban places as products of culture, and the modern architecture and housing movement of Europe were being analyzed and publicized by Catherine Bauer. This intellectual context fertilized Vernon's creative ideas for linking

architecture's past--plazas and boulevards, comfort and views--to its future in our own time and place.

The presence in the Bay Area of the late 1930s of those two highly significant leaders, and others--Fritz Gutheim in Washington for one--who figure prominently in the oral history, turned thought toward architecture as a vehicle for social reform. The Depression, followed by the optimism and freshness of the Roosevelt era, woke us up to new possibilities in our fields.

An image of DeMars begins to form as we visualize his passage through these life experiences. Turning points of place, people, and circumstance--as well as opportunities taken full advantage of--shape his most significant, overriding theme in environmental design. Here I speak of his deep-seated belief in the interconnectedness of all elements, and his understanding that design must happen within a comprehensive framework that deals with the environment as a whole. One cannot read this oral history without knowing how Vernon DeMars thinks. He is a teacher, and the lessons are here to read.

Qualities of the Persona

At the heart of DeMars' being as a professional and as a man lie strong personal, or core attributes. His inventiveness and imagination, both in the technical and visual sense, permeate the University's Student Center, offering a new and urban experience for the University campus. The sunken plaza provides a space as well suited for walking through as "hanging out," and as comfortable for bongo-drum players as "Mostly Mozart" audiences. For years after completion of the buildings Vernon stayed on as a not-always-so-welcome Pro Bono advisor and caretaker, most recently supervising the regilding of the golden "Bear in the air."

This "staying on" surely is at the core of Vernon's attributes, identified as devotion and perseverance, so constantly demonstrated by DeMars in the Sproul Plaza complex, and so deeply given to his wife Betty, who died in 1987. Betty's own qualities of inventiveness and imagination combined with Vernon's produced as a gift the series of ten handsome banners drawing on the theme of the history of theater--from the Ancient Greeks to Charlie Chaplin--that have hung high in the grand lobby of Zellerbach Hall since its opening in 1968. As Betty's long illness deteriorated her anima, so too the banners showed the wear and tear from exposure to the sunlit lobby. Vernon's persona then came forth with a daily agenda of caring for Betty that included a project to completely renovate the banners. This involved Betty to the extent her ailing muscles allowed, a move that surely contributed to her courage to carry on.

At a memorial gathering of friends in The Faculty Club I spoke of Betty DeMars as a creative individual in her own right. I had admired Betty Bates--something of a "name" on the campus in the early 1930s--from afar. Years later we were close friends, Betty and Vernon and my wife Mariantonia and I, in Washington as well as Berkeley. We enjoyed Betty's down-to-earth common sense and the dry humor that gave a touch of reality to some of Vernon's soaring ideas. Her folkdancing costumes, her hand-stitched quilts in blue and white Picasso patterns--and later when she could no longer travel, her avid watching of slides of trips abroad shown by her friends--these, and her final participation in the banner restoration, were all integral part of the fabric of Vernon's creative life.

The Ageless Urban Designer

Throughout the years of Betty's illness, Vernon's devotion and perseverance were revealed by the nearly singular focus of his energies. As that chapter concluded, Vernon remarkably transferred those energies to urban design. Mustering that combination of enthusiasm balanced with pragmatism he took on his old interest in San Francisco's Embarcadero where the Ferry Building stands looking out Market Street to Twin Peaks. In 1955 he had fought the erection of an elevated freeway, in 1985 he fought to pull it down, and in 1989 damage from the Loma Prieta earthquake resulted, after some struggle, in the freeway being pulled down. In 1990 Vernon initiated the battle to create a plaza in front of the Ferry Building that would reflect turn-of-the-century San Francisco.

The design he created and the model he had built--a work of art in itself that includes minute heroic statues--displays youthful enthusiasm combined with the practical and detailed considerations of traffic movement, access ramps, underpass grades and the like. His constant energy on behalf of this vision for the Freeway Plaza brought forth a concept so well-conceived that at the time of this writing the solution is unmatched by any so far produced through official channels. No one has studied in such detail the full range of considerations needed for such a complex task. However, current low standards in civic design result in a dominance of strictly functional and utilitarian guidelines in a political context that is very different from those years of Telesis--of which Vernon speaks in the oral history. Lacking support from an earlier era's enlightened community leaders and practitioners in urban design like Dorothy Erskine, Bill Wurster, Thomas Church and others, this further example of Vernon's perseverance stands as heroic.

Let me describe this seemingly ageless octogenarian, who has lived in all ten decades of this century. There he sits in the office of the city's Chief Executive Officer with the transportation manager and other key officials, selling his plan. After working all week until midnight

on drawings detailing how the underpass could be made to meet state standards, he makes a presentation to the citizen's committee. His calculations are shot down without warning by engineering-minded opponents using inflated figures. Undaunted, he feeds his point of view to the press. His insistent vision challenges the powers-that-be in City Hall ready to desecrate the Ferry Building by running six lanes of traffic in front of its venerable facade, and the day is, for the moment, saved.

As you travel through the turning points of Vernon's life and work in the oral history that follows, keep in mind the metaphor of the weaving of a city's fabric as a parallel to the lifetime turning points expressed in the Table of Contents. This metaphor I hope will focus your experience of reading the DeMars oral history, and allow you to find in it the full richness of his life.

July 1992

Francis Violich, Professor of City
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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Vernon DeMars is a master architect, planner, and designer, whose work and influence are visible in urban centers on both the east and west coasts. Born in 1908, he received his Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1931. From 1936 to 1942 he was District Architect for the Farm Security Administration's regional office in San Francisco, where he made lasting contributions to the field of low-cost housing design. In 1943 he was Chief of Housing Standards for the National Housing Agency in Washington, D.C. He was in the Navy on duty in the Caribbean for the next two years, and after the war his design work was on the East Coast. From 1947 to 1949 he was visiting professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Vernon DeMars returned to Berkeley in 1951. For the next two years he was a lecturer in the Department of Architecture, as well as consultant to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and abroad, to the Marshall Plan Housing Program in Germany. In 1953 he was Professor of Architecture, reducing his teaching to half-time as of 1965. He was partner in the architectural firm of DeMars and Reay from 1955-1966, and since 1966, DeMars and Wells.

In Vernon DeMars' vita, after Governmental Service, Foreign Travel and Study, Academic Career, Professional Affiliations, Consulting Services to Governmental Agencies, Participation in Public Lectures, Forums and Conferences, Publications, and Competitions, comes "Creative Activity." Major creative work for which he is indeed celebrated includes Eastgate Apartments, Cambridge, Massachusetts; the University of California at Berkeley's Student Center, and the College of Environmental Design; Capitol Towers apartments in Sacramento; Marin City redevelopment; Easter Hill Village in Richmond, California; Mililani New Town in Oahu; and San Francisco's Golden Gateway Redevelopment Project.

The Regional Oral History Office first proposed a memoir with Mr. DeMars a few years after his retirement from the faculty of the Department of Architecture at Berkeley. That proposal was made in 1979. In it the Regional Oral History Office spelled out the contribution such an oral history would make to documenting the history of the concept and realization of what we now think of as environmental design. DeMars' oral history would range over a half century of the history of architecture at Berkeley--studying it, teaching it, making it. It would

reflect the broad practice of Mr. DeMars and the close working relationship he has with his fellow American Institute of Architects medalists. However, that year the granting agency chose to fund another oral history.

In the meantime, Vernon DeMars' retirement began to look extremely active. Rather than settling into some sort of long-sought quietude, the always-energetic and disarmingly-youthful DeMars took retirement as the signal to get back to work on some favorite projects, which could largely be defined as looking out for the best interests of his former clients. This stewardship took--takes--forms that range from concern for details on the Berkeley campus--little things like the choice of seating and curtain fabrics in Zellerbach Auditorium, and overseeing re-gilding the Golden Bear--to righting the wrongs of the past.

Righting wrongs is certainly what Vernon DeMars has done in electing to champion the cause of tearing down the Embarcadero Freeway, in guiding the San Francisco city fathers to implement a roadway plan similar to that put forth in 1955, the time of the first freeway wars. Being champion of that cause meant commissioning a model of the 1991 DeMars plan, and all-night design charettes. This is a hard-working gadfly--not just alighting, but staying around until the job is done right.

To return to the history of the DeMars oral history, it is not unreasonable to argue that architecture can be taken as a metaphor for talking about social and political history, and that the stylistic choices and changes are some kind of mirror of civilization. Such grand thinking in part lay behind the formation in September 1939 of a group called Telesis. Vernon DeMars was one of the founders. That group, Telesis, had a far-reaching influence on the professions that comprise environmental design--it is now thought of as constituting the first step in creating the University's College of Environmental Design--and on the history of San Francisco city planning.

Vernon DeMars was one of the "small group of young architects, landscape architects and city planners [who] gathered in a Telegraph Hill apartment in search of identity, direction, and a role in the shaping of San Francisco and the Bay Area." That is how Telesis fellow-founder, landscape architect and planner Francis Violich, put it in an article in 1978. At that time Violich was already assembling for the University his archives of the Telesis history. Professor Violich's concern for the future of the archives was contagious, his interest suggested a more ambitious documentation, and in September 1988, from the College of Environmental Design at Berkeley, came a request to do an oral history memoir with Vernon DeMars.

This new proposal to do a DeMars oral history was within the context of getting on tape the memories of all of the Telesis members still in the area. The full project, currently seeking funds, moves forward in various forms. Interviews are being done with landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, with Fran Violich, and with Jack [T.J.] Kent, all three men notable in their fields, and the last two honored by the American Institute of Planners with the title Planning Pioneer. And the Vernon Armand DeMars Oral History, now completed, indexed, bound, and available to historians, fulfills the promise of the oral history first proposed in 1979.

Vernon DeMars, having said yes to the interviews, proved to be from the first word a committed interviewee, with a daunting memory for anecdote and detail, vivid powers of visual recollection, and a professorial determination to make the record clear. He conjures up the past in light of the present, and he puts the interviewer, and the reader, "into the picture." We are there, from Stillwater, Nevada, and Southwest Anasazi cave sites, to Alfred Roth's apartment in Zurich and Frank Lloyd Wright's drawing room at Taliesin. We are taken on an architectural tour that goes all over the map, with a very interesting travel companion.

Francis Violich has provided a thoughtful, appreciative introduction to his professional and personal compatriot, DeMars. The biographical material and table of contents constitute another useful introduction. Part of the task in writing an interview history is to give the reader a sense of what it was like to spend some forty hours interviewing Mr DeMars. That scene: Vernon DeMars lives in the house that he designed for himself and his late wife Betty on The Uplands, off Tunnel Road in Berkeley. The approach and feeling of the house is in the Bay Region style of the 1950s, with Japanese elements such as an entrance walk of three great stones "bridging" a gravel "stream," a Chinese-red dutch door, and from inside views of the gardens and a canyon green with a mixture of trees lining a creek and waterfall. That is where we met for the interviews, Mr. DeMars in his chair, I on the sofa. The papers he wanted to have at hand were spread in front of him on a broad coffee-table.

We never interviewed on the day his cleaning woman came. The kind of order she brought to his life was sacrosanct, and I guessed that was because her arrival forced some organization of the escalating number of papers that his three or four concurrent causes required. (The Embarcadero Freeway and Waterfront area redesign, while the main cause were not the only cause.) We interviewed from an outline, and we never got as far as we wanted to. That is because DeMars' didactic approach extends to any subject he is involved in. He believes that every story worth telling is worth telling with full historical groundwork set in place. Interestingly, it was as if every project, large or small, got the same kind of intense consideration and treatment from Mr. DeMars.

Editing the nearly thirteen hundred pages of transcript from thirty-six tapes recorded from November 1988 through July 1989 by necessity became another of Vernon DeMars' projects, and it had to be fit in around the day to day demands of the Embarcadero area redesign. It was a huge pile of material and it received very careful attention from Mr. DeMars. Often--again--the story as he told it felt too sketchy for him, insufficiently introduced, and he felt compelled to put down simply, in a marginal note, how something fit into the larger picture.

Vernon DeMars' editing, which followed extensive editing for clarification from the Regional Oral History Office, is very important to the usefulness of this document. And at his request I also edited more than I might ordinarily have, to eliminate dangling ideas, incomplete sentences, and vague allusions to "things," "and so on." We both worked to make this lengthy oral history readable, winning our first review from J.R.K. Kantor, retired University Archivist, who proofread the final manuscript: "Surely this is a meaty oral history and would make a 'good book.'"

Thanks are due to Mr. Kantor and to Professor Violich for their contributions to the completion of this memoir. And to Georg Buechi, who in doing research for his doctoral dissertation in the College of Environmental Design conducted several interviews with Vernon DeMars that elicited myriad aspects of decision-making in designing Wurster Hall. His dissertation is titled Interpreting Buildings as Interpretation: Towards a Hermeneutics of Building, 1991. Thanks also to Roger Montgomery, dean of the College of Environmental Design, whose interest in the history of Telesis led Vernon DeMars to do this oral history, and to W. Russ Ellis for his early role in masterminding funding. Now Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs, at the time Ellis was Professor of Architecture.

It has been a pleasure to work with Vernon DeMars on his oral history. He is a person of many interests, which is certainly an ingredient in making him such a successful architect. He takes a large interest in the world, and in the arts, in current events, in politics in all of its forms. His retirement life, though busy, is not "all work"--or rather, his work takes place in such places as Santa Fe, and Paris, as well as in San Francisco and Berkeley. When it has been difficult to get his attention focussed on some of the final details of the oral history, that is because his attention has been focussed on the more concrete final details of San Francisco's waterfront--two different ways of making history.

A collection of writings by Vernon DeMars, and related documents, has been deposited in The Bancroft Library. A descriptive list is appended. This oral history makes a substantial addition to the Regional

Oral History Office's work on the history of architecture. We take every possible opportunity to document this important profession, and the list that prefaces this volume is a guide to completed interviews, long and short, in architecture and landscape architecture.

The Regional Oral History is under the direction of Willa K. Baum and under the administration of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer/Editor

July 1992
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name VERNON ARMAND DEMARS

Date of birth Feb 26 1908 Place of birth San Francisco Ca.

Father's full name LOUIS AVILA DEMARS

Birthplace Montreal, Canada

Occupation Machinest / Auto Repair Business.

Mother's full name BESSIE WILLIS DEMARS

Birthplace Little Rock, Arkansas.

Occupation Housewife

Where did you grow up? San Francisco, Oakland, Nevada.

Present community Berkeley Ca.

Education A.B., U.C. Berkeley.

Occupation(s) Architect, Planner, Educator.

Special interests or activities Art, Music, Theater and
Drama, Travel, History, Ethnic Dances & Ceremony,
Philosophy, Philosophies, Secular Humanism as
well as Ethical Humanism and - Architecture.

I FAMILY

[Interview 1: November 30, 1988]##¹

Louis Avila DeMars, Father

Riess: Your mother was Bessie Willis, and she was born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1888. Did your father find her in Little Rock?

DeMars: No, he didn't. My grandmother's maiden name was Margaret Moore, and she had married a newspaper man, Edward Willis, in Little Rock. He was from New England--I think it was Maine--and he was a Republican, which was rather unusual in that part of the South. He ran for Congress from there. He didn't get it, and I think they almost ran him out of town on a rail. But anyway, I never quite learned why they moved to San Francisco, or exactly when. I may dig this out. When one is younger one doesn't ask these questions which one should.

My grandmother was sixteen or so when she married. My mother, Bessie, had an older brother, Guy; then came my mother; and her sister, two years younger, named Lelia.

My mother must have been nine or ten when my grandmother got divorced and was remarried to a Mr. Anderson, who had some position in the railroad. Maybe that's how they got the ride West. But anyway, they were already living in San Francisco when the earthquake came along.

On the French side of the family, what happened was that there was this young French Canadian, Louis Avila DeMars, who had just come down from Montana, from Missoula, after having come across Canada from Montreal when he was nineteen. He came down to San Francisco with an uncle of his named Alex Quevillon. And Alex

¹This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 577.

was interested in my grandmother. I think maybe she was divorced from number two already, from Mr. Anderson. Maybe that would have done it. And my father, tagging along, who was already in his mid-twenties, was interested in my grandmother also, because she was blond and looked very young. Well, he was far too young for her. She was pleasant with him and so forth, but he finally got the message after a couple of years--I guess he was in and out or something like that.

In these couple of years my mother went from being sixteen to being eighteen, and since he wasn't getting anywhere with Grandma, he began to be interested in Mother. I think maybe my grandmother by this time figured he didn't have much of a future, and that's why the attempt to discourage this arrangement. I suspect that maybe that's why the girls were sent to the convent at Rio Vista on the Sacramento.

By the time the earthquake came along my grandfather, now also remarried, had moved to Seattle where he was managing editor of the Seattle Daily News. So he sent for them. I don't know how long they were up there, but it was a month or so at least before people were returning and getting into their houses again and all this. I know that they told about right after the earthquake having to move out into the street with their stove and so forth. And I think they had a tent at this time. They lived on Guerrero Street.

Riess: Did you hear a lot of those stories when you were growing up?

DeMars: Yes, quite a bit. I was fascinated as a kid, but then sort of forgot the details of it. They had no pictures.

Riess: Why was your father considered to be unpromising?

DeMars: I think because he was interested in automobiles. He was trying to get work related to them. For a while he was a chauffeur, a driver, and a mechanic. He finally ended up having a business of auto repair in Oakland. And I must say he worked hard. He wasn't just an auto mechanic, he was really a machinist.

Riess: Did you see him work? Did he take you down to the shop?

DeMars: One thing I remember. I was born early in 1908. And by 1912 he had gone from automobiles to airplanes. He and another man cooked up a scheme that they were going to take people on airplane rides on the weekends. This was apparently a thing that was going on. I don't think they were into stunt flying and so forth, but he knew about airplane engines, and I remember stacks of magazines about flying.

But in 1912, I remember, I guess it must have been spring or summer, we were in Gilroy where they had rented a large field. There was some kind of a tent, and the airplane went in the middle part and there were little living quarters on each end. This other man's family was in one end and we were in the other. The airplane was a Curtis biplane, the same kind that Lincoln Beachey was flying over the 1915 Fair when he was killed. It was one of the kind that did loop-the-loops. The kind of thing in which you were sitting in a chair on the front wing with a strap, a belt.

I was rather fascinated, I knew all about it, at least the family said that. So I would have been four-and-a-half or so when this was going on. I guess you can talk by then. But the locals would come out and say, "What are those things on the wings?" And I would say, "Those are ailerons to maintain the lateral stability." They were much impressed.

Riess: [chuckles] Yes.

DeMars: Then I'm told that I liked to get up and sit in the seat. The other man--I can't remember his name--was scolding me a couple of times. They said I hit him on the head with a monkey wrench or something one time when he was bending over. I don't think I had anything quite as heavy as that, but I may have done something to get him to mend his ways!

Riess: Your father was kind of a black sheep in some way?

DeMars: I don't quite know how different he was.

Riess: I take it he didn't go to college.

DeMars: No, he didn't. I don't know how far he went in school.

Riess: What was your sense of your mother and father together? Was she trying to bring him down to earth all the time?

DeMars: No, I don't recall that. Again, it's strange how much you do and how much you don't remember of this. Now one of the things I do remember is I spent an awful lot of time with my grandmother. The family was living in San Francisco, then they moved to a house on 24th Street in Oakland. Just around the corner there had been a kind of garage in which my father was building an airplane. I thought it was very interesting, because the thing he was building was supposed to be the future, a single-winged airplane. This monoplane was a Newport, which looks more like modern airplanes than all the other kinds at that time, the biplanes and so forth. He never got it finished. I don't know what happened.

Riess: Was it his design, or was it a kit?

DeMars: No, no, it was a kit of some sort. But he thought this was the way to go. And of course, it didn't have a way of cantilevering the wings. The wings were out this way [gesturing], but there was a little tripod over where the pilot sat with wires that went out and held the wings up. Then wires came down to the wheels underneath to hold the wings down. [laughter] So it was kind of a box-kite thing, you see. But the body was totally enclosed; you weren't sitting out in the wind and everything. The motor and the propeller were out in front instead of behind you, so that when you crashed, why at least you fell on the engine instead of the engine falling on you. I don't know whether that was part of the premise or not.

Riess: Did it get off the ground?

DeMars: No, it never got that far.

Riess: Did he ever get into the air?

DeMars: Oh yes, but I don't know whether he ever got into the air again. In Gilroy the summer ended shortly because a cylinder burst on the plane and they barely made a landing. The plane hit a fence on making the landing. Nobody was hurt, but the engine was beyond salvage, and I don't know what happened to the rest of the plane. It wasn't really wrecked, but they didn't have a very soft landing. I guess there must have been two seats to take up passengers, but I think that's all they had. They were seated one next to the other. No, I don't know how far that went.

One of my father's three sisters was Eliza, who had married Amedie Nicole. The family name was Demers in Canada. Auntie Nicole lived in Sausalito for many years. She was a dressmaker when there were such things. She had quite a supportive clientele and lived way up on the hill. We'd go over there for Christmas and Thanksgiving, often, and they'd pull out mattresses and things and sleep on the floor overnight. Now her husband had, I guess it's proper to say, sort of deserted her at an earlier stage and gone to Alaska during the Gold Rush. I don't think he did very well in the Gold Rush. And he was apparently mechanical. He got working in the canneries, taking care of machinery and so forth. But he had a wanderlust thing, and didn't have much responsibility to the family.

At one point--I just learned this from my cousin Stella Nicole [Patri] recently--I was staying with my grandmother, my mother's mother. She had a little piece, about a quarter of an

acre, in Mountain View where she was renting. It had chickens, and she always had white leghorns and Rhode Island reds. I would feed the chickens. Purely coincidentally, right catty-corner was a one-acre plot which Eliza Nicole, my aunt, had bought. She came into a little legacy of some sort from the family and thought that if she had this country place that had chickens and so forth, that maybe the husband, Amedie, who didn't seem to like the big city where they'd been living in San Francisco, could be enticed back. I remember he was there for a while. Both of his children called him an S.O.B., which he sort of was. [laughter] I can remember a couple of instances with a kind of violent temper. But you see, that's not really on my bloodline of the family.

The reason I bring up the Mountain View thing--I was apparently sent to be with my grandmother, or she had asked for me. I was only about six at the time in Mountain View. It was time to start school, so Stella, who would have been sixteen or eighteen at the time, took me to the little school which was, oh, maybe half a mile away. And I was there less than a week before I got the mumps or the measles, whatever was going around, and came back and then stayed there with my grandmother until I got well from that. So I saw a lot of the Nicoles right across there with their chickens and things, and I played in the mud. I remember making sort of dishes in the mud, you know, clay. Because I was interested in doing things with my hands at quite an early stage, apparently. I guess there wasn't too much else to do! [chuckles]

One of the first presents they gave me was some plasticine, so I was modelling chickens and horses and dogs and things in this. I don't think I started doing any drawings at all, but it was shortly after that we moved from the last place I said was in Oakland.

We moved to San Francisco and we shared a house with the Nicoles. We had the front part of the house and they had the back part there. It was a flat on Dolores Street. Now this was in 1915 during the Fair. So I would have been seven at the time. And I just loved that. That may have been one of my first bites. I can remember the impression of--.

Riess: One of your first bites?

DeMars: Well, I mean getting bitten by the notion of building and architecture and scale and so forth. You know what the Palace of Fine Arts looks like now, well that was one of the smaller buildings in that exposition. The Tower of Jewels was just--you felt like a little ant. There was an arch that held up the bottom of that bigger than the rotunda of the Palace of Fine Arts now.

And there were other triumphal arches in these great courts and all that. I got to be quite taken with the grandeur of it all. Almost every weekend, we would go to the Fair.

Riess: The whole family?

DeMars: Well, my mother and father and I, and I suppose we went sometimes with the others.

My other grandmother died while they were still in Mountain View, because I remember her--this is Madame Demers, my father's mother, her maiden name was Deschamps. Now this gets back to Canada. Where is it? [looking through material] This is what my friend Jack Tolan, also a cousin, sent down about the Cyr family, and it has one line on it on the Deschamps. Here was Azilda Deschamps, who married George Demers.

Riess: [reading from material] "In the memory of George Demers and Azilda Deschamps." Tell me about this variation in spelling DeMars.

DeMars: I didn't know for a long, long time that the name had been Demers. In later years we were having Christmas or Thanksgiving or something with Auntie Nicole, Madame Nicole, in Sausalito, and her daughter Stella was there. And I said, "Auntie, how did the name get changed?" She said, "Well now, I'll tell you."

She and her sister Azilda, Mme. Quevillon, who I think was already separated from her husband, had come to Montreal. The Deschamps part of the family--this is the grandmother, that's where it gets back, there are lots of them, there's Cyr and Deschamps--they were ranchers and so forth in Montana, a regular French colony in Missoula. And my aunt said, "When my sister and I were there our names were not Demers, of course, so everything was okay. Because you see, in the town there was a house and it was run by a woman--you know, not a very nice house. Her name was Madame Demers, but no relation! no relation!"

Then here was Louis coming to join them at the age of nineteen, coming from Montreal, and arriving with the name Demers. "Well, we couldn't have that go around. So we got our heads together." It was Azilda, I think, who said, "We'll just change the letter 'e' to 'a' to DeMars." I remember that Mme. Quevillon was inclined to put on airs, so while she was at it she made the 'm' a capital.

I see that there are other DeMars in the phone book, a couple, anyway. I've never gotten in touch with them for their story of how they got it changed, because I imagine each one made

the change in their own way if necessary. And I can see that Demers would probably get pronounced "DEE-mers" here. With the "ars" I think you are more inclined to say "DeMARS." Anyway, that's the story.

Riess: Did all this make you feel a little French?

DeMars: A little bit, I guess. When I went to school in San Francisco I was encouraged to take French through grammar school, and it always came rather easily. I never worked very hard at it, so I didn't get terribly good grades. But I took it all through high school and two years of college. I was in France just this spring and a lot of it really came back quite easily. I would say something and I'd think, "Gosh, how did I remember that?" An idiom or whatever, you know, would simply come back.

Riess: But you did hear it at your grandparents?

DeMars: Well, to some extent. There'd be Stella and her brother Maurice, my cousins, and Auntie Nicole would say, "Maurice, fermé la porte, s'il vous plait." And he'd answer, "Okay Ma, I will." You know, this kind of thing would go on. And the same way with my father. I would say something in French to him, and he'd answer me with as few sentences as possible, or as few words as possible, and then switch right into English, you see. Interestingly, I don't remember him ever having an accent, whereas my aunt, his sister, Mme. Nicole, who lived in Sausalito, had an accent to her dying day. It was kind of cute, you see. She'd laugh about it and we'd kid her and so forth.

Riess: Why was she called Mme. Nicole, rather than saying Tante or something? She sounds like a fortune teller that way.

DeMars: Well, let's see. I guess she probably used that on a card for her seamstress business.

Riess: Oh, that's right.

DeMars: But we called her Auntie Nicole--without any "t" almost: Aunnie Nicole, and the Nicole as if it were Nickel.

Stillwater, Nevada

Riess: Why was it you were moving so much?

DeMars: Well, I haven't quite figured that out. It wasn't only in San Francisco. At one point I figured I'd been to about fifteen schools by the time I was in fifth grade.

Riess: Terrible! Really hard to take.

DeMars: Yes. Also, I don't know quite why I was off with my grandmother so much. I will get back for a moment here to when we were living on Dolores Street. We first lived in an apartment house, our family--that is, just my mother and father and myself--almost at the Market Street end. And that was the first year of the Fair, because I remember that we were going back and forth to the Fair from there. I don't know why we moved in sharing this flat with the Nicoles.

Immediately I came down with diphtheria, which wasn't a very good thing to come down with in those days. They didn't have penicillin, but they had an anti-toxin, which is something that looked like what they'd approach a horse with, a great big long needle to stick in the behind and so forth. An aunt from Canada, I think a sister or cousin who was a practical nurse, she agreed to come out and take care of me while this was proceeding. My grandmother had already gone off, I think to Nevada. This was to marry husband number three, Mr. Green. The Nicole family delighted in referring to him as "Monsieur Vert." They lived in Fallon first, and then Stillwater.

I don't know how long it took me for the diphtheria business, but when I got well enough to sit up in bed I guess that was the time they gave me this plasticine set. And I made a model of the entire exposition, that is, a little model of the Tower of Jewels about so big [gesturing], say three inches high, and the other buildings, the main ones, too. We had a Chinese grocer who would bring the groceries into the house. I don't know how they showed it to him, but he was excited. He wanted to send it to China and they would make it in porcelain, you see, and they would ship it and we would all get rich or something!

Riess: It was very good?

DeMars: I guess it was reasonably good, because I would have been now seven.

And during this period my father made me a model, a flying model of this Newport airplane that he never finished. It was quite big.

Riess: You're saying about a three-foot wing span?

DeMars: [laughter] That's right, that won't show up on the tape. Yes, thirty inches or so. It was a flying model with wind-up rubber bands to the propeller. I was still in bed, really, when this came up. I remember difficulty walking.

Well, then the doctor decided that I was okay, but I was a carrier of the disease, the diphtheria. (Actually the house had been quarantined with a great big yellow sticker on the front door.) I should be sent to a dry climate. So, my grandmother lived in one of the driest there is around. Fallon is right at the edge of the forty-mile alkali flat. I was sent. I don't know whether my mother took me up the first time or whether my grandmother came down and got me or what. I went up there twice in a couple of years and went to school. Those were two of the schools I went to, one in Stillwater.

The second year I went up in 1916, which I found very exciting. There had been a pre-Gold Rush in the town of Wonder, Nevada, across the forty-mile alkali flat. We moved the whole household in one covered wagon with a team of horses and a buckboard and all the belongings and so forth to this house. I was excited as anything. I would run alongside everyone as fast as they were with the horses, across some mountains and foothills. Then I was there a winter. It was the first time I'd ever seen snow.

I remember the schoolhouse there. It's a place where they've made earthquake studies in recent years because there are some faults near there. An engineer in the architecture department had done a report on it. In the front of the report there was a picture, a little photo of the town taken in 1914. I looked at it and I said, "Gee, that's exactly the way I remember it." From the hill looking down, I could see the schoolhouse, see the road.

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Rather recently I visited Bodie, the ghost town on the California-Nevada border, and it looked exactly the way Wonder looked, as I remembered it. Even the stamp mill of corrugated iron and concrete for part of it. Everything else in this town, houses and stores were of wood, some of them falling over.

I was telling another friend about this rather recently who had driven through Wonder, and he said, "Well, there's nothing there now." I said, "There must be something. Aren't there some ruins?" "There's the mill, you can see that still up on the hill." "But," I said, "there must be piles of boards. Or what about the foundations?" "No, no, there's nothing." I said, "I can't believe it!" And apparently I guess everyone who went back

through in recent times carried away the boards, and anything else that could be carried off for use or just for souvenirs. Bodie was about ten times as big as what's left there now. But it was a regular movie-set early town, you see.

I got to love the smell of sagebrush out there, things like that. And I guess I had a kind of love of the big open spaces, as well as cities.

Riess: Were you allowed to wander when you were there?

DeMars: To some extent. I would say the town of Stillwater is at least two blocks long: one block here, the street [laughter], and another one here, the bridge over the slough. Grandmother had chickens, of course, and we'd feed the chickens daily. A pump in the backyard, a wood stove, you had a bath once a week in the washtub, a crank Victrola with some records, and kerosene lamps.

Riess: So why couldn't you wander?

DeMars: Oh, because of rabid coyotes. Now whether there were any--. But we were told not to wander off into the sagebrush. Rattlesnakes and rabid coyotes. So we didn't wander too far afield.

School Years and Mother. Bessie Willis DeMars

Riess: Were you a good student?

DeMars: Well, I think I was good. I don't know how much of this I'm reading into it from a study made in later years by [Donald W.] McKinnon. Do you know these studies of personality assessment?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Bill Wurster appointed a small committee of us to be the ones to select the subjects for that. We were to list the most creative (and successful) architects, world class, in our opinion at that time. I was on the selection committee, and I didn't realize 'til later that even we were being studied by the kind of answers we gave. McKinnon was fascinated by the architects. I think they were his favorite bunch of subjects, because they were kind of a mixed bag of things.

One of the things that really pleased me very much was that McKinnon found that some of his architect subjects would get onto a thing in their studies--they weren't all very good students

necessarily, because they had a one-track mind--they got on something interesting and they could be brilliant about it. As for other things, they could ignore the consequences and just--well, it happened to me in college. I ignored physics because I was so fascinated with architectural design, that took up all the time. I was interested in physics, but not in doing problem sets, which were kind of a drag. They took a long time. So when I found that out later on it made sense to me.

Riess: With all of these grandmothers and your mother did you have any home teaching?

DeMars: I think my mother taught me to read before I got to school. You know, the little children's books and things.

Riess: In fact, did your mother have any work of her own?

DeMars: Well, yes. I wouldn't say that she was "artistic," in quotes, as such, but I think one of the reasons that I was living with my grandmother so much is that I think they both had to work to make ends meet. She was a secretary and stenographer. This name just comes up out of the bottom of the barrel: Dunham, Carrigan, and Hayden, a law firm in San Francisco. I know that she took shorthand, which I guess she learned in the convent that she had gone to. Was it you I was discussing the convent with?

Riess: No.

DeMars: We were trying to get the name of it. I thought it was something like Rio Vista.

Riess: There is one out in Rio Vista. As a matter of fact, it's where Louise Davies went to convent school.

DeMars: I know who I was talking to about this. It was Travis Bogard, and it was just the night before last, on Sunday night. We had dinner. My mother had her eighteenth birthday in there. Now where is Rio Vista?

Riess: Well, it's on the Delta.

DeMars: That's what I thought. The reason I brought it up--you know Travis Bogard, don't you?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: He helped restore the Eugene O'Neill house out here in Danville, and he's written a couple of books on O'Neill, knows the whole story. My mother had--and it used to hang in my room, I

remember--it was the top of a cake box. It was wood. I don't know that cakes necessarily came in a wooden box, but on her eighteenth birthday, at the convent, all the girls in her group had signed their names on this. One of them was Carlotta Monterey, Eugene O'Neill's wife. And she used her stage name. She was in the same class with my mother. Her name--of course, Travis came up with her maiden name right away, which has escaped me again. I should have written it down right at the moment. But that's just a little sidelight.

Riess: Your mother had been trained in secretarial skills in the convent and she was working to make ends meet?

DeMars: Well, my father was sort of in and out of things, I think. I know that clear through, even into high school--of course, we were hit by the Depression, with others, but that's even before the Depression, some ups and downs. I don't know whether my father did odd jobs, working on cars, or something. But then for a while he was a chauffeur. Maybe he worked for somebody else as a mechanic, you see. It wasn't until later that he really got his own business with George Gund. It was DeMars and Gund. They were right catty-corner from Tech High in that block where--I think it's almost the same building that Abbey Rents had for a while, I noticed when we were there once recently. So occasionally I would go with him to work. I had a bicycle, and I would go back and forth. This was when we lived on 32nd Street in Oakland.

I finished my schooling from the fifth grade on in one school, the Durant School on 29th Street. But up 'til then--I'll check this out again, but I know one time I went through it and I had gone to fifteen different schools. One was in San Jose. We were in San Jose when I came back from the second year in Nevada. I skipped two grades when I got back, because in the one-room schoolhouse in this town of Wonder I was learning long division and I was learning all sorts of things ahead because there was one teacher in this one room. I thought it was a great idea, too, because the whole room would be gathered together while the teacher would read to us about Mowgli and the Jungle Book and so forth.

Riess: At home, at dinner, did you have conversations that had to do with politics, religion, with what people did?

DeMars: I don't remember. I suppose we talked a little bit about current events which touched us, something going on, but not much about politics.

Riess: Your parents weren't particularly political?

DeMars: Well, Mother was violently Republican. Father sort of went along, I guess, whichever. So was my wife's family, too, later on. In fact, after we married we were living at the house for a while there. And while I was away it was time to vote, and she was going to register, and her mother said, "There's never been a Democrat registered from this address. You can go register in Berkeley!" Now her mother was not that kind. I mean, she was very sweet. I don't know whether it was partially a joke or what. And her father said, "That man!" meaning Roosevelt. Of course, that was when I was working for "that man!" but that's later. But I don't think it was a particularly intellectually oriented thing.

When the whole family got together, I always thought that the French side of the family was the interesting side. In fact, we sometimes had visits with my mother's sister's family. They had three boys. Jimmy, the oldest one, had gone to Nevada with me at one of those times to be with our grandmother. It was a sort of unhappy little household. The father, strangely enough--remember the S.O.B. that I mentioned was married to my aunt?--he was a mechanical engineer who also worked in the fish canneries in Alaska. And they knew each other there. They were two of a kind. They were both rather overbearing with their family, and this one very brutal in some ways with the kids. Not physically striking them, I don't think, but he was very mean to Jimmy, the older cousin.

Riess: Was your father in World War I?

DeMars: In World War I he worked in the shipyards.

Riess: Oh, did he?

DeMars: Yes, probably was working in the engine room.

Riess: What shipyards?

DeMars: In Oakland, it seemed to me. So for a while we were living down on Oak Street, not far from where the museum is there. There was a big lumberyard nearby where we kids played.

Riess: You moved a lot. Yet I want to ask you what your home environment looked like. What kind of things were around? Was there a piano that went with you? Books?

DeMars: Yes, there was an upright piano, and I was given piano lessons, and it never took. Whereas another little friend of mine, almost the same age, had the same piano teacher, who kept telling us how great he was doing, and he ended up becoming a professional musician with a band. I love music and I wish I did play, but for

some reason or other, other than being able to play "Chopsticks," I just have no facility in that line.

Riess: As you went from place to place, were there parts of your life that were consistent, that were carried around?

DeMars: Yes. I remember we had a set of Mission furniture, oak, you could drive a truck across it and it would hold up. I can remember those in each place we lived. But these were all rental things, apartments, flats.

For a couple of years we lived in a rather large first floor flat on 32nd Street off Telegraph in Oakland. And finally we must have gotten enough together--I guess I was already in high school, yes, I had to be--and they bought a very cute little house on East 23rd Street, off Park Boulevard and 8th Avenue in Oakland. A nicer neighborhood, actually.

This little house was two stories with a very steep roof, the bedrooms upstairs, and a separate dining room, closed off with sliding doors with a stair going up, and one bathroom. No heat, we put a floor furnace in later on. But I remember we still had the oak furniture from there. My mother had that house until after I came back from the "Wars in Flanders," so to speak, and she lived there alone after my father died until she was well into her eighties. She liked it, but then she was a little bit afraid of the stairs, which she should have been because it went up to a little landing and then there were three steps that turned, you know, "winders." And if you didn't watch yourself coming down you could easily get dumped off onto the landing or the rest of the way.

An Influential Teacher

DeMars: When we were living on 32nd Street I would have been in about the sixth grade, sixth through eighth there, and I remember taking a manual training course which I liked very much, and an art course in grammar school. And someplace, I've got it here, I have a drawing I made of the school, a little perspective from sitting out in the street and drawing it. It's really quite good. I wouldn't do much better today. You know, things go to the vanishing point. I had a good camera eye for relationships and proportions and so on. And I enjoyed that. That must have had some influence on my architecture. I liked to draw, and then I took art courses in high school.

Riess: This was at Technical High School?

DeMars: At Tech High, yes.

Riess: It was good? What did Tech High mean? Did it really mean that you were getting more that sort of training?

DeMars: It was called Oakland Technical High School, which had two branches. One was college preparatory, and that's the branch I was taking. The other students were heading towards vocational work with vocational courses. And I think it was okay that you really didn't know who was what, because they also took certain courses, English and so forth, same as we did.

Riess: The branches were not physically differentiated.

DeMars: Only the shops themselves. They had real shops. There was auto repair, and they had other such things. I don't recall any--I didn't do any more manual training then. But I enjoyed very much working with tools. I remember things today, when I use a plane and I set it down I put it on its side, because that's what we were taught. You don't put it down flat because it might damage the blade. And other things like that really got ingrained in you.

Riess: And were those art teachers good?

DeMars: Yes, really quite good, I thought. The final one I had, that would have been my senior year--I thought I was going to be a commercial artist, whatever that was. I wasn't quite sure, but I liked to draw, paint, and so forth. And she must have had the prescience to see that whatever I--. My work was quite good, but I didn't fantasize or do anything particularly original in my art work. It was pictures of things as they are and as they were. I was very good at even copying pen and inks and things from samples out of books which particularly appealed to me, works of N.C. Wyeth and so forth, which I think is a good way to learn the skills.

Riess: Shades and shadows?

DeMars: Yes, shades and shadows. And the pen and ink thing, if you copy someone who does it well, that's a way of learning how you do that. Later on I broke away from having to copy other people's as the whole thing. I have two or three examples of those someplace and they're really damned good. I was surprised.

Riess: What was her prescience?

DeMars: Well, it turned out that she had gone through architecture at Cal and was married--I don't know that she was married to an architect, but there weren't as many women draftsmen in those days as today, so she was teaching art, you see, not even mechanical drawing. (I took some mechanical drawing course at Tech, which I enjoyed also.)

I guess maybe she looked at my work or something like that, but whatever, she suggested my going into architecture, because, "You can branch off into so many different things if you find yourself wanting to. If you have the opportunity to go into commercial art it won't hurt you. And in the meantime you'll be able to earn a living as a draftsman, or whatever." And so I did. But not with a great thrilling breakthrough or whatever. I must say that when I went out to the University and went to the old Ark Building and saw some of the student work there, I thought, "Oh my god, I could never do this!"

Finding a Niche. Boy Scouts

DeMars: In high school I was a bit of a loner. I had a few friends, but I wasn't part of any little clique and I wasn't running around socially very much either with others. I'll tell you one of the things that had happened to me, and this is, I think, relevant--I would have been thirteen. Let's see, what grade would I have been in?

Riess: Eighth?

DeMars: Just about when I was graduating into high school I went into the Scouts. I had missed going into the Boy Scouts at age twelve, and I don't know how I got encouraged to it, because I don't think I knew any other kids on the block that were Scouts. But this hit a nerve. I enjoyed it very much. And it also actually gave me for the first time a group feeling, working together, more than just the kids across the street, you see.

The first thing was the Tenderfoot. You go in as a Tenderfoot. Then the Second Class, and then First Class. Well, I had gotten to Second Class, and it was time for the summer camp. All families now, you know, you go to the country, go to parks. We had an automobile at quite an early stage. There's a picture of me at about age four--I'll show you some of these--sitting behind the wheel of our Pope-Toledo.

Riess: Pope-Toledo? I've never heard of such a machine.

DeMars: With brass rods going down and so on. My mother had on a big veil. We would drive to San Jose, an all-day trip or two-day trip. But we had never gone up into the mountains or that kind of thing, you see. So here was the Boy Scouts teaching about the great outdoors.

Oh yes, and about this time, just before I went into the Scouts, my grandmother went from Mountain View to Mayfield, which is near there, and then Cotati, where she had chickens also. When she was at, I think it was called Mirabelle Park, a little cousin of mine on my mother's side, this is her sister's oldest boy, he went to Nevada with me one of the times. I think I may have gone there three years in a row, because there were two quite separate trips when I was alone, and then there was the trip when he went up with me.

I think that maybe this was just getting us out of the family's hair while Mother worked and so forth, too. I didn't resent it at all. I loved going to my grandmother's. Family life was not as memorable as my times with my grandmother in many ways. But I do remember my mother, I think when I was quite young, trying to get me to read and things of this sort. Always very supportive, and my father was very proud of my little drawings and all this kind of thing. But let's see, where were we?

Riess: Boy Scouts.

DeMars: Oh yes, the Boy Scouts. I had gotten my First Class merit badge there.

Riess: And you were saying something about summers.

DeMars: Yes. I went to the summer camp. I liked it very much and I made some very good friends there, almost closer than any of the ones I made in high school. A couple of them were in high school and then we saw each other there. One was Hollister Smith, and his brother Malcolm Smith. Malcolm went through architecture about the same time, roughly. He was a little younger than I, kind of a shy fellow. Hollister was very, very bright.

I really got very seriously into the Scouts. I see that this held back my social development in a way, because I got onto, with several other fellows, shooting for Eagle Scout. You had to get twenty-one merit badges in a certain amount of time. And other than my school hours, the other time was taken up doing this.

Then I not only got to be Eagle Scout, but there was a small group, maybe about four people in all of Oakland, who were

beginning to get--. See, there were about fifty merit badges. We'd begin hearing that Eugene Schultheis had just gotten a merit badge in sociology, or whatever. So I got one in sculpture. No one else in the Council had this.

Then when I got to be Eagle Scout I was fifteen or sixteen, and I became a sort of junior scout leader, and that is when I got interested in Indians.

The Vision of the Panama-Pacific Exposition##

Riess: Do you think you were sensitive to beauty, beautiful things?

DeMars: Well, I must have been. I know I thought that everything in the Fair was just beautiful. And I still think so. Really, nothing like it has hardly taken place since.

Riess: Well, it's fantasy, isn't it?

DeMars: Not only fantasy. It was fantasy in that case, but it was real. I mean, later on the fairs--this was a three-dimensional, complete reconstruction of the vision of the City of Gold, the city of the future. I mean, this was the Golden City. And it was done to look like it was made of real material.

Do you remember the Palace of Fine Arts before it was rebuilt in concrete?

Riess: No.

DeMars: The original thing was a little bit more satisfactory. Now it looks like concrete with color in it. But originally it had a texture in the plaster. They had a system of doing this that looked very much more real than the present one does. It looked like real travertine and real marble and that sort of thing.

Riess: When you would go, weekend after weekend, did that just mean that you would wander to different parts?

DeMars: We'd go to different things and then we'd go to the Zone. Let's see, 1915--they had a model in which they had U-boats sinking the Lusitania and all kinds of things, moving waves, the machinery for which has been discovered since in Drottningholm. For ancient operas they had this on the stage. You turned cranks and so forth, you see, and there were rollers. But there were slots

between so you could have a little ship with somebody underneath it, you see, with this thing that would be going along, that you could go like this [gesturing], and then there'd be a little explosion of something here and then it would shudder, and then it would upend the back and go down. Well, we were doing this behind the couch. We made cardboard things and we'd make it go along the top and BOOM! It would sink, you see.

But certainly, looking for a modern movement, I would characterize this I think as almost the end of the grand Beaux Arts period. After the war things began to change already, after World War I. Arthur Brown did the horticultural palace there. On some other occasion I'll show you a few examples. I've got a couple of books on the subject, two or three. And this was really a marvelous thing. But all of the architects talked the same language at that time. It was done in the Beaux Arts, and they would never get a chance to build anything as big and stupendous and all this.

Willis Polk, of course, was the chief planning architect of the Fair. Well, we won't get into this too much, but Maybeck was just--well, he was not "just," he was already a respected, noted architect. But he was kind of just part of the team that was assisting Polk. Polk was reserving the Palace of Fine Arts for himself. He had been working on it. But I guess he was also busy with all the rest of it. He tried some things and finally said, "I'm just not getting anywhere with this, Maybeck." He said, "I've got to meet with the whole board and everything else this coming week. Take it home with you over the weekend, see if you can do anything with it."

Maybeck came back with this pastel drawing which was totally different, apparently, from what had been in mind. Although maybe it was slated for that site. They had kind of a pool. There was a tarn there, it was a place where water came down, and they were going to sort of fix it and make that as a part of the setting. So maybe that part or something circular might have been in the mix. But when they saw Maybeck's sketch, according to the stories I've heard, the board were all absolutely bowled over and thought he could carry it a little further for Polk. I don't know whether it was in front of the group or whatever, but Polk said, "Maybeck, you do it. It's yours."

This was the first time that a fair was lit with floodlights. Then they would have fireworks at night. There was a great thing called a scintillator. After some of the fireworks had gone off, it made clouds in the sky and the fog. This was a set of searchlights, all different colors, that made this gigantic fan

that would move back and forth sort of like this [gesturing], way up in the sky.

Riess: Excellent!

DeMars: I was going to mention one other thing with the Fair. In the Zone there was a giant's castle. You walked in this room and the table would have been as high as this house. His pair of boots, I'd say the boot was about the size of the chimney here, you see. The pair of boots fit under the table and there was a chair over here and you could walk around under this, like you were--. I had a similar feeling as I walked under the big Tower of Jewels and so forth. But that thrilled me. This other one, I guess it puzzled me about the scale, which it was supposed to do. It was supposed to intimidate you.

Riess: Troubling sort of feeling.

DeMars: And I guess it was exciting, too.

Riess: Something about scale is exciting. At Disneyland there's a ride where you get in a little car and they "take you into the atom." All around you things are getting bigger and you're "getting smaller." It is wonderful how you experience that kinesthetically.

DeMars: Yes. And I wouldn't say it's obvious that things like St. Peter's had this purpose in mind.

Riess: You wouldn't say that it's obvious, or you would say it's obvious? I mean, the Gothic had that in mind.

DeMars: They had it in mind, but in a different way, because the pieces and parts in Gothic architecture, the columns will take off, you see, there will be a whole cluster of that at a scale that you might find in a smaller church. So there's the human scale relationship, except it soars, like a canyon, a high canyon.

Of course, the Romans did it to some extent. I don't think they had quite the resources ever to do it as gigantically as St. Peter's. Although the Pantheon is spacious and so forth, it still is somewhat articulated. They tried to get some big columns and things, but to really go all out and make all the parts bigger than people had ever seen before, this is the greater glory of God and the greater intimidation of mankind, I think. [laughs]

Riess: Yes. And so what is the intent at the Exposition?

DeMars: Well, it was grand. To be grand and noble. This was the way a city could look. It would have beautiful courts and it would have towers and it would have this kind of thing and the great gardens.

Riess: Where do the people live?

DeMars: Well, they weren't trying to make an imitation of a real city. It's kind of interesting, too, that it wasn't a Disneyland thing, see. They would do that maybe in the Zone. In fact, I think there were several things in there that were like being in Belgium or Sweden, or something. But this was a serious piece of responding to the problem: What should a grand Exposition with great optimism for the future be in the city that's just come up out of the ashes and is going to show the world that this is the way things can be and ought to be?

Given the problem, this is the way you would do it, this way. And you might not build it just like this in the town. Because the main pavilion things--well, it was also responding to the weather conditions, the high winds there that you get today. So this whole central, tremendous block had these great blank walls with entrances. They were very elaborate, Baroque or--well, there were several kinds of architecture. It all went together. There were about eight quadrants that went together. You would come in different entrances.

Each was an opportunity for a colonnade that would be different from another one. Here would be a courtyard this way a different shape than the one over there. However, each of these elements had a great clerestory element that criss-crossed through it, on top of which was a dome like Santa Sophia, with the windows all the way around and a green dome. You had that repeated eight times, you see, which gave you a unifying element. At the same time, as you got close the details were different. The entrance was different, or this courtyard would be different.

One of the balancing elements was the Tower of Jewels, in the middle, this very high thing. Then in the midst of the two side blocks there were courts. The two first courts were different, but from a little distance they were called the Italian towers or something, so that the front of them were two towers very much like the Ferry Building, that sort of thing. But this pair, when you saw them up close, were different than the other pair. There were sort of three stacks of things and the other had only two. This was the kind of detail that the Beaux Arts people understood rather completely.

One of the things in Maybeck's description of his Palace of Fine Arts was that it was to evoke the image of a ruin. The

sadness, you see, the kind of nostalgic sadness. At the same time it's not a fake ruin, it's a complete thing. He didn't go around and have the Corinthian columns busted off and so forth. But part of it, they had no tops. This whole line of things, you see, and then this dome in there that's just a pavilion, but it doesn't have windows. So it's as though it had come down through time to give you that feeling as you walked through this, if you're walking through it.

Riess: Are your feelings about it and your recollections of it based on studies since, or are you actually talking about what you recall?

DeMars: I frankly can't tell, almost. I know that my images that I had of it over the years were very strong. And I've only added a bit to it by these couple of books and so forth.

Riess: So you really were paying attention to where you were, when you were six years old?

DeMars: Well, I was really seven, but yes, I saw it as very different than any other part of downtown or whatever, the great gardens and the fountains and all the nice things that a city can be. But as I say, done the way the Beaux Arts would do it. It's a particular given problem. It isn't imitating anything else other than the vocabulary of architecture that they all inherited and agreed on. And that's how it all went together. An exposition all done by Corbusier I don't think would be that interesting, I know it wouldn't be, because he didn't have that much of a vocabulary. He was still inventing the architecture.

As an example of what I mean, a building like the Museum of Modern Art in New York was a very crystalline and unique feature in this whole street of brownstone buildings, you see, a kind of jewel in the matrix. You began with a few good examples, but then you had whole streets done by architects of no great talent necessarily. Whereas in the Beaux Arts days you didn't have to have that much talent to put together an acceptable kind of thing, because the Corinthian column was a Corinthian column, and all the rest of it. This is the vocabulary--how do you spell a word and so forth, and what word do you use? The geniuses did marvelous things with them, but others, it became part of the texture of the city and it was interesting.

Like the Emporium in San Francisco. I don't know whether that was considered one of the great marvelous buildings at the time, or a number of the others along Market Street. But today they are really a lot more interesting than some of the other things that are going up. And, of course, Nordstrom's is trying to be a little bit in that spirit. There's a turn taking place in

post-modern architecture, so-called. They don't know how to handle it yet.

Riess: Did you know any architects when you were a boy, or did your parents know anyone who did this business?

DeMars: I would say no. And I wouldn't have known who did those things. No, we didn't move in a professional class, I would say.

Riess: So you didn't ask yourself, "Who made this?" You weren't bitten in that way by seeing that.

DeMars: Yes, "I want to do this"? No, I guess not, other than making some more little models of things in clay or something, just in enthusiasm for the thing itself.

Riess: Those plasticine things, do they get painted? Is that what you do?

DeMars: No, the clay itself is in different colors. For instance, there was a yellow ochre that was very much the color--I can visualize this right now--very much the color of the imitation travertine surfaces of the buildings.

In many cases, like in the Tower of Jewels, they were as though the columns had been vandalized from a Persian temple or something and brought back, you know. Those two columns in St. Mark's Plaza in Venice, at the end there, I think were that sort. These were war trophies. It was hard to get them there, and it cost a lot, and so therefore it was very important. So in San Francisco they imitated the marble columns with twisted fluting and then some of the green marble. Well, I had all the colors in my plasticine, so I did my little Tower of Jewels. It was about this big. [gesturing]

Riess: Did you do it with your fingers or did you use little tools?

DeMars: Well, there were little tools, too, but I would make the little shapes there and take the tool and stick it in place, I guess.

Riess: Did you really try to reproduce the Tower of Jewels you saw, or did you just make your idea of it?

DeMars: No, I was making a model of it. You see, it didn't occur to me to be doing my own creative version of anything of that sort. I think this is probably more typical of kids anyway. At first you do that sort of thing. Copying other pictures at first, if you're interesting in drawing.

Riess: Yes, sure.

Surviving Childhood##

Riess: Did you have any favorite books?

DeMars: At some point my parents got me the Book of Knowledge. I remember a set of a whole bunch of things. I was an early pioneer in falling in love with dinosaurs. I thought it was marvelous. And it didn't occur to me to speculate. I just assumed that if everybody said so, why, it must have been so.

My father was a Catholic, of course. He was an altar boy when he was younger, from the Canadian side. Mother was Episcopalian, made a great point of it and sending me to Sunday school and things, but she was not a churchgoer herself as such. Of course, I thought it was much more fun being Catholic than a Protestant. The incense and the trappings and so forth. Then, I don't know, there might have been some occasion when I had gone with the DeMars family and Mother went along or something, so I knelt down and crossed myself. And "Young man, I don't want you doing that." "Why shouldn't I do it?" "Because you're not a Catholic."

Riess: So you read the Book of Knowledge.

DeMars: And I read Stevenson, Treasure Island, and the other Stevenson things. I'm trying to think of what I would have read at an early, early age.

Riess: Horatio Alger?

DeMars: I don't think I did until later. I did read it much later, but I didn't come across that at that time. I liked to read. What else would I have read?

Riess: The Bible?

DeMars: Well, I dipped into it here and there. We had a family Bible. A little hard-going for a kid, you know, with the King James version of English, the thees and thous and so forth. And as far as the Pledge of Allegiance each morning in class, you know, I don't recall us having that forced on us daily. I also know that God had not entered it yet when I was in school. "One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." I think that was a dirty trick, sneaking in God. And in fact, really, I'm

surprised that it was accepted. But there are so many fundamentalists.

Betty said that she recited it "with livery and justice for all." Livery. And the song, "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of livery." It was years later, she said, that she saw it was the same word as liberty.

But you know, unless this is discussed with children and made a point of, just to do the rote thing, it then has no meaning to them. Don't you think so?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Just to recite it. How do they know--I don't think they know what "allegiance" means. "I pledge allegiance to the flag." Well, if a teacher does take them into it--I don't mind them doing this--but I almost think that too often repetition makes it become totally meaningless; they do it without even thinking.

Riess: Do you feel that you were encouraged to be independent?

DeMars: Let me see. I guess that I would say so. At what stage?

Riess: Well, just in general. For instance, could you have gone down to the Fair by yourself at that tender age? Could you have taken the streetcar and gone down?

DeMars: I don't know if I could have, or I don't know that it occurred to me to want to do that. I walked to school some blocks away. But I didn't wander downtown from where we lived on Dolores Street.

Riess: Having had diphtheria and mumps and things, do you think that they worried about you more than they might have?

DeMars: Maybe. I did have an awful lot of--I had all the diseases going at the time.

Riess: That's hard on a mother.

DeMars: Yes. What else can you have? Mumps, measles--

Riess: Chicken pox.

DeMars: Oh, another thing. I had appendicitis. They reduced it simply by--I've still got my appendix--with ice packs and things. I think the operation was more dangerous in those days. Have I missed anything?

Riess: Scarlet fever, whooping cough.

DeMars: Let me see if I've told you about this thing. [lifts pants leg] I think it's on this knee. Yes. See this?

Riess: A little scar, yes.

DeMars: Yes. Now the apartment house we lived in on Dolores Street, there was a vacant lot next to it, but actually there was a passageway. It would have been a wall-to-wall, and later on they built these apartments with a front entrance. To get into the back yard you had to have a tunnel. A little thing, just a few feet wide, I guess.

We were going to the Fair that day, and I was sent out front to get the milk bottle, the milk bottle and the newspaper, or something. I came running back and tripped on something and the milk bottle fell down and burst and I fell on top of it and a piece of the milk bottle went right into my kneecap here. I got into the house and it was bleeding, so my father took me to the emergency hospital. I guess maybe the glass got pulled out, and they started to take some stitches, and my father fainted. [laughter] I didn't!

Now I have to show you--I'll do this quickly. On my Greek trip in May--did I tell you about this already?

Riess: No, no.

DeMars: I tripped on a triglyph, if you can call it that. It served me right. We were at one of these sites of ruins, and I was jumping over from one to another. I was going to take a picture of this piece of wall and stuff that had been set up. And there were two other--there was a photographer, one of the women with all this photographic gear, and then another young man who was on the trip. The other group had gone ahead and we were waiting for them to be out of the way so we could take this picture.

I went to jump over this flat kind of stone--there were rather sharp edges and so forth--and my back foot slipped a bit, so instead of my foot landing on the stone my shin did, the whole weight of my body on it. And I rolled over. So what it did, it made a cut here and then another thing up here.

This young man came over and looked at it and he sort of put his hands on it. And it didn't bleed at first at all, but it just--it looked like when your fingers open up like this, you see, you couldn't quite see the bone, but it was obviously quite deep--no blood or anything, and he quickly closed it up like this.

So the lady photographer comes up and she said, "I have band-aids." So she put band-aids over it.

By this time the guide, a woman Greek guide, saw this commotion going on here, me lying on the ground, the others hovering around. So she came back to see. Well, could I walk? I could walk. Other than hurting my knee at first, I didn't feel anything much. And from beginning to end, it never bothered me particularly. They led me back to get the little boat to take me out to the ship and the ship's doctor. But the ship's doctor, since everyone else was ashore, he was ashore. So we made a trip back and found a doctor in town who didn't speak English, but the guide took me up. And the doctor took four stitches in it and bandaged the thing up. By this time the word had spread around so everybody had to see it. [laughter]

But I must have been kind of tough.

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: And I have a kind of high threshold of pain. I didn't faint, you see, when I cut myself, but my father did. [laughter]

II INDIAN DANCES, AND THE ENGLISH CLUB

Indian Dances in Oakland

DeMars: I was already an Eagle Scout when Ralph Hubbard came to Oakland with all of the belongings, all the costumes, all the equipment, and so forth, to do a big pageant of Indian stuff.

Riess: You mean at your school?

DeMars: No, he would come to a city and he'd teach the Boy Scouts in that place the dances. I'll backtrack a bit. This was one of the sons of Elbert Hubbard, the one who wrote A Message to Garcia.

Riess: Oh, yes.

DeMars: Elbert Hubbard had this crafts movement, like the movement in England with William Morris. They actually built furniture, and it was in that style, kind of Art Moderne. They had long hair, did all the things like hippies.

Apparently the two brothers didn't go along with this quite as much. I mean, when they were old enough to get away from it they apparently did, and they both went to Montana. I don't know quite the story of how they got away or why, but they were young men at this time, I would imagine in their mid-twenties, something like that, maybe earlier. It was near the Crow Indian Reservation. They got acquainted with the Indians--I guess it may have been when they were younger, because I imagine it took several years for this kind of thing to develop to this point, as it did with me. [chuckles]

The Boy Scouts, you know, have an international jamboree. I think it's every four years. At the time the next one was going to be in England. I don't know whether he'd been doing this before or not, but they got him to train a whole group of Boy Scouts, collected from all over the country. There were probably a couple of hundred of them, I imagine, when they had the

jamborees. I never went to one, but he would teach them Indian dances and costume them, and so forth, and then they would do this performance, you see, for all the other countries in the world. So they did.

He had started this, and he must have been collecting these for some time. Then he was going around in various cities in the country. This was exactly 1923, so I would have been fifteen. I think by this time I was an Eagle Scout. I think it takes two years. This was fascinating to me, and to a little handful of friends of mine, too, that were Scouts also. I guess we were learning the real thing. We also had the costumes for a particular group--I'd say maybe twenty-five or so--he had real buckskin and beaded moccasins, war bonnets of real eagle feathers, the whole business.

Riess: And you were allowed to use them?

DeMars: Yes, we were dressed in those for the final performances. There were a couple of hundred kids in this whole thing, and even the least of them had something.

Riess: You mean all the Scouts in the area would be drawn into this?

DeMars: Yes, those who wanted to participate, you see. He needed one hundred and fifty costumes, let us say, whatever it was to do the thing. But he had enough. There were terrible wigs and so forth. But the other stuff was really quite good.

We did the pageant in the Oakland Auditorium. I've got a couple of photographs of that someplace. I have a photograph of him, or I have a negative from a photograph that I'm going to get printed one of these times. When he left, the small group continued to be interested. I began reading Ernest Thompson Seton and so forth. There was a book, Two Little Savages, I think by Seton. Then I read books from the Bureau of Ethnology, I guess it is. And I really dug into the thing.

Not very much longer after that, in 1925--oh, I went on with merit badge gathering. Gordon Grant, my close, real buddy at that time, decided we should get a merit badge in archery, because no one else in the area had a merit badge in archery. So we began looking for someone who knew about archery. Well, Dr. Saxton Pope. So okay, what you do is phone him and say, "We're Eagle Scouts, we want to get a merit badge in archery. Can you help us?" In fact, he may have been--they usually have people designated, you see, who would be then the examiner. So he told us to come over to see him in the city. Of course, we were fascinated with it. The place had racks of bows and arrows and

he'd reach in and give us a handful of the arrowheads they used to shoot lions with, and so forth. So we had two or three of those.

It ended up, that first meeting, he [Pope] gave both of us two pieces of yew to make bows. Yew wood is the ideal wood for bows, though you can make them with other things. Then you actually connect them with a fishtail splice in the middle, and that becomes the center, and you make the rest of the bow from this thing. So we both bought a pair of those, and he gave us some feathers and showed us how he made his arrows, and talked a lot about it. He had just written a book called Hunting with a Bow and Arrow. Do you know about this?

Riess: No.

DeMars: All right. Hunting with a Bow and Arrow, the whole first part of the book is about Ishi. When they found Ishi, who was suffering from malnutrition and was really sick, Saxton Pope was the doctor sent to treat him. And I think Ishi was brought immediately to the University of California's Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco.

They wanted Ishi to go back and show them where he'd lived. Pope went with them, and he showed Pope his bows and arrows and things. He made arrowheads of obsidian, but it was easier to work glass, and he would raid the city dump for beer bottles and Bromo-seltzer bottles.

Riess: Oh gosh, the end of the Indian.

DeMars: He took the glass--he didn't just take a chunk of glass--and he shaped it the same way he would have a piece of obsidian.

Riess: He could flake it?

DeMars: Yes, yes. And he showed us some of these things, and they were absolutely beautiful. They were much more delicate very often.

I was able to do it. I still could. You learn the trick. It's hard to get the rounded side off the glass, the shiny part. And if you were not concerned artistically, or with the integrity of the whole thing, you might just leave it. But he got rid of all the original bottle shape, just so it came out more like one of his obsidian ones. Glass is a little more dependable. Sometimes the obsidian things don't break in the direction, so that's why you find so many that are unfinished and thrown away.

Well, I was fascinated with all this stuff. I corresponded a couple of times with Hubbard. He had a ranch in Colorado, about

forty acres of it. He had some cattle, he had some horses on it, and he also ran a boy's school there in the summertime. It was one of those very expensive ones that you see advertised in the New Yorker. I didn't know about the school part at the time.

An Indian Summer, 1925, and Indian Friends

DeMars: Because I was so indebted to Hubbard for sort of opening up this interest, I decided to make for him a set of arrows, copying Ishi's. There were about six different arrows, an arrow for shooting birds, and one for deer, another one for small game. The one for birds had a hardwood stick insert with a little pair of cross sticks so that when you hit the bird it didn't make a mess of the whole thing, it knocked him over, you see, and killed him. I forget what the rabbit one was, it was a smaller point. The deer were rather big ones. The feathers were different in some. But these were all shown in Pope's book.

I thought, well, this would be from the Far West, from the California Indians, and it would be a nice present. So for a Christmas present I made, from our manual training and all that, I made a box with four of them. I had them set in, a little groove for each one, and the whole thing, and I sent it to him. Well, I got a beautiful letter back. I may have it someplace. I remember part of it. He said when he opened this it was like a little tinkle of ice water down his spine.

Then what happened the following year with Gordon Grant--this was my buddy at that time, the other Indian dancer--. His name, if it doesn't ring a bell, his uncle was an illustrator the equivalent of [N.C.] Wyeth for books like [Robert Louis] Stevenson's. Particularly he was rather noted as a painter of sailing ships--I think he did one of the great sea writers--but he also did one of the books on Stevenson. Well, he had a commission to do something on an Indian theme. So he got himself some costumes. And they weren't just costumes. I mean, they were really a valuable collection. I've hardly seen the equal since then. A complete war shirt and leggings and buckskin with wide beaded bands down the side, then beaded moccasins and these breast plate things you've seen. They're actually shin bones of deer.

Riess: Which Indians have that?

DeMars: That would be the Sioux. So he had those. The war shirt was the Indian pattern, but a second one was a coat of buckskin, of course. This was a coat such as a man's morning coat, quite a

long one, but with a bit of fringe sort of halfway between. But on it was the most beautiful embroidery in porcupine quills, which is the typical thing before beads. Although they were still doing it a bit.

Riess: The uncle of Gordon Grant had this?

DeMars: Yes, and he had given them to Gordon. So he had this complete outfit, of which I was very jealous. Well, I don't mean very jealous.

When we were in the Boy Scout camp, we were comparing notes and things and doing some of the dances. There was a lot left over from this experience of the big camp. They would end up doing some dancing in the summer camps. I would go to the camps each time, and after a while I got paid to be an assistant. By this time, our interest was growing further. One of the things we did in the summer camp for the campfires was to teach a few of the kids to do some dances. Then we got them to make them some costumes. Then we made drums and rattles and stuff as part of the activities in the summer camp. At the Oakland camp I was hired one summer to make a whole Indian camp. We built an adobe hut and had a tepee nearby.

One year Gordon and I made a tepee out of old cotton ticking. I sewed it together on my mother's sewing machine. It was about twelve feet high--no, I'd say ten to the top, with poles sticking out. And one summer we went to Yosemite Valley, camped near Camp Curry, did dances in Camp Curry and at the Ahwahnee, and got paid by the Curry Company.

Riess: You made it known that you were available?

DeMars: I didn't advertise particularly, but the rumor got around. And I had a small gang. If they'd pay us enough, why, I could have about four people. Otherwise, two of us could do more or less a program. This actually came a little after what I'm about to tell you now.

Riess: This was in high school though?

DeMars: This started in high school. The pageant was '23, the package of arrows must have been around '24, and in '25 we were invited to Hubbard's camp. Gordon Grant and myself were invited to come and be sort of assistant counsellors and teach them archery. They would make bows and arrows and so forth. We lived in tepees there, and these were full-sized, they'd go clear up to the ceiling of this house, and there were four or five of them.

Riess: Where was the camp?

DeMars: East of Colorado Springs in an area called the Black Forest.

Hubbard ran the camp with his wife and his local Boy Scouts also there as both counsellors and taking care of the place. I would say there were about thirty or thirty-five campers, a lot of them from the East. This was the farthest east I'd ever been, going that far.

A couple of things we did: we made a trip to Cheyenne, Wyoming, for the Frontier Days there. There was an encampment of six hundred Sioux Indians with their tepees and everything. We visited them, and he knew a lot of them. They had a great pow-wow dance, and a rodeo, and all this. We went by truck, drove up that way from Colorado.

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DeMars: Later on we went back, and by that time we had made some bows and arrows and we had an exhibition of that. We danced for the natives. Later in the summer, the high point of the summer, we had a covered wagon and a chuck wagon for the food. There was a cook, of course, who went with us, and about twenty horses, and then the tepee poles for three tepees. This proceeded down through Colorado Springs and Denver, making quite a procession. By this time we all had cowboy boots and cowboy hats. That was the first thing that we bought.

Then we went up the Arapahoe Peaks. The top of the Arapahoes are 14,000 feet. So we made an encampment at 10,000 feet to sort of get our lungs accustomed, and then climbed the other 4,000 feet the next day, and then came back. We went through Central City and Blackhawk and the Gold Rush towns and all that on the way. That was that part of the trip.

That was '25. By '28 we were already doing these periodic engagements, dancing for ladies' clubs or for the Red Men or whatever. And I'd get \$25 or \$50 for one of these affairs.

Then I had to see the real thing. So I hitchhiked, went as far as Taos, and just hung around the Indians and learned a lot of new steps, and songs. The songs we'd learned from the Boy Scouts were just old stuff. This was the real thing. And this was when--there would be a little group that would come down into the town of Taos from the pueblo. Do you happen to know Taos?

Riess: Yes, I've been there.

DeMars: They would go into the hotel there, right in the downtown part of Taos, and do a little performance, and then they'd borrow a hat and pass it around and get a little bit. Although when I was first there they didn't have the hotel. This I'm describing later. I was staying in an auto court, as they were called; they weren't called motels yet. The Indians would stop first there and get one of the little cabins and make up, and then they'd do a few dances and songs and things before they'd move into town. They may have had a couple of calls. Then they'd go back to the pueblo.

So here's a picture of my friends--this is Adam Trujillo and his two sons. This picture was taken before the Korean War, because both of them had gone overseas into that. I took this picture. He's wearing Gordon Grant's breast plate thing. This was taken on a trip with Betty, right after we were first married.

Riess: [looking at pictures] I want to see you in costume! Is this you? You look very Indian.

DeMars: Well, I did manage to look Indian. I was kind of tan there. Of course it's a wig. This was at the same ceremonial in Gallup, New Mexico. The Indians got in free in their grandstand, and I put this outfit on with the knowledge of my friends and went in and walked with them and sat with the Indians. Because otherwise it cost five bucks for the main grandstand.

Riess: Did the Indians resent your arrival?

DeMars: In Gallup they didn't know where I was from, or who, or whatever. So it was just kind of a joke with the ones I was with, you see.

Riess: Did you perform when you were in Taos?

DeMars: No. I would try some of the steps when they were doing their make-up and practicing before. With a drum, they were trying the songs. I just sort of gently edged into the thing like a kind of a groupie, and then I'd try to sing along with them. They couldn't stand my singing the song wrong, so they'd stop it and say, "No, We-ah-ha-eh-ne, oh-we-ah-eh," or something, you see. Then I'd write it down a little bit and so on.

Riess: Because they knew you were genuine.

DeMars: Yes, that I was interested. On the basis of some of this--they were doing an Indian play at the Bohemian Club, so I was made a member of the club. This [looking at picture] is my Eagle Dance that I did in that.

Riess: This is 1934.

DeMars: The rest of them all had tights and sneakers. I've got real moccasins. That would make me stand out separate from the rest. As a matter of fact, I was supposed to be a character called White Eagle. This publicity picture was made earlier on. But I made a set of eagle wings with white turkey feathers. This thing made the white eagle.

Riess: You wouldn't use real eagle feathers, would you, because isn't that terribly significant? For instance, if an eagle feather falls to the ground from a headdress don't they have to reconsecrate it?

DeMars: Well, they're also illegal to have now. That's something else.

Riess: But you never got into any kind of trouble with the Indians for this?

DeMars: Well, of course, I wasn't dancing with Indians normally.

One time a group of Pueblo Indians, one of whom I had known down there, came up to the Emporium for some event. The group was sponsored by a group from up here, as well. This friend from Jemez, Christino Casaquito--his other name was Joe Panama [chuckles]--he knew that I was interested in the songs and things. When they were here my mother agreed to invite the whole bunch of them to dinner at our house. They came, and the Navajos in the group didn't speak any English, so he translated for them.

Then, I don't know how I pulled this off, but in East Oakland there was a playground, and a good friend of mine that I had known in high school--in fact he was the colonel of the ROTC, and later on he became an attorney, Enrico Deloso, he was already working as an attorney--in this big playground they were having some festival or other, and we were going to dance at the thing, and it turned out that it was the same night that I had the Indians for dinner, so I asked Christino, "If you could sing the song, we are going to do these dances. Would you come along and do the drum for us?" So they did. Well, of course, they got kind of a kick out of it as well.

I'll show you [looking through pictures]--this is one of the guys that danced with me in a Pueblo costume, and here I am in the version of this Kiowa costume.

Riess: Did you make this version of it yourself?

DeMars: Well, I made parts of it. We got the sleigh bells, and you notice these are real moccasins. At that time you could trace your foot and send it to Oklahoma and they made you a set of full-beaded moccasins for about \$5. And this I bought at Cheyenne on that trip.

Dance Performances at International House, and at Bohemian Grove

DeMars: We may as well wind up with the finale of all this stuff. By 1932 I'd graduated from UC with a degree in architecture in the middle of the Depression, and the most cash I made was doing Indian dances around. Finally, I thought we'd do a real show at International House. This [review of it] is sort of long to read. I'll give you this copy of it, the review from the Daily Californian.

Riess: It [announcement] says, "International House presents Vernon DeMars and a group of fifteen in a program of Plains and Southwest Indian dances." "Na-ga-hae?"

DeMars: I've even forgotten now what that means. It's a Navajo word.

Riess: "Professor Derrick Norman Lehmer presenting his own American Indian song compositions."

DeMars: He was a professor of mathematics. And it tells a little bit about him in that review. He would give little recitals doing music of the California Indians. He'd gone out and both recorded them and written a bit of poetry that would be the text of the things.

Now the thing at the Bohemian Club was two years later, but this was really the depths of the Depression, and there were no jobs for architects. And I was making more money doing this and summer camps. I was travelling around the same way that Hubbard did earlier. I'd have a list of four or five of the camps, like the Piedmont Scouts, the Campfire Girls outside of Nevada City, the San Francisco Scouts, and Oakland Scouts. I had costumes and stuff, and I'd take along some rawhide that I'd get from the slaughterhouse, and we'd make a drum and rattles as part of the thing.

Riess: Did you design this program? Was this your own drawing?

DeMars: Yes, in fact I did, and it's a linoleum cut. I did the whole thing, the design.

Now one other thing I wanted to show you. We were very authentic in the way we did our things. You know kachina dolls? This article is dated 1981 [January-February 1981] from the California Monthly. This was an exhibit at Kroeber, and that particular costume is the Jemez kachina, which is one of the really more spectacular ones. And it's the end of the whole kachina season. But I had managed to collect the whole outfit, this sash and the one that's underneath that, the green one, and this thing, the kilt, and most of the other parts. (This is not me, but it's one of our fellows in it.) Can you see it in this picture? Look at the design on the kachina, see, on the middle part of the sash? Then, of course, the red one on top. The kilt thing, notice that on the picture, you see?

Riess: Yes. So when you say collect, that means that you bought it?

DeMars: I bought it, yes. These things cost a fortune now. I lost that one in a fire. But I have the sash. On the next trip I'll show you some of the things, just for your own amazement.

Riess: If I'm good and patient.

DeMars: For this production--and it's remarked in the review--we had stage sets and so forth. Here, by pulling some little strings here this corn grew up, you see, and then the ear fell out each side and the leaves sort of fell out. It isn't too hard to do because that's the way nature does its work, you know, just wrapped around. And on the other side of the stage we had a thing come up with a big squash blossom, and we had that open out if you pulled something.

Riess: The design aspect of it, you did that?

DeMars: Yes.

Riess: And you'd learned how as an architecture student?

DeMars: Yes. And in fact I had done stage sets for a couple of other things. Later on, after we were married, Betty did the costumes for a ballet that Christiansen had done for the San Francisco Ballet called "Winter Carnival." They had just discovered a new piece of music by Strauss, I think it's called "Music of the Spheres" or something, a very good skating piece. And I designed the sets for that for the stage of the Opera House.

Riess: In fact you could have made a career of it?

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE PRESENTS



VERNON DEMARS
AND A GROUP OF FIFTEEN IN
A PROGRAM OF PLAINS &
SOUTHWEST INDIAN DANCES:

NA - GA - HAE

AND
PROFESSOR DERRICK NORMAN LEHMER
PRESENTING HIS OWN AMERICAN
INDIAN SONG COMPOSITIONS

TURSDAY EVENING
B.6, 1932 - 8:15 P.M.

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE
AUDITORIUM BERKELEY

RESERVED SEATS **ADMISSION 75c** **STUDENT TICKETS 50c**
SS DALL'S OFFICE-SATHER GATE BOOK SHOP-TUPPER & REED - & INTERNATIONAL HOUSE BAZAAR



Vernon DeMars in Plains Indian costume for a performance at the Bohemian Club, 1938. Wire "drawings" by DeMars.

Photograph by Gabriel Moulin

DeMars: Well, and Betty was going to make a career of doing costumes. She even went to New York to seek her fortune--this was before we were married. [chuckles]

Acceptance by the Indians

Riess: How were you accepted by the Indians?

DeMars: Well, we had a few specific friends, you know, that we'd met and knew. We would see them each year, go down there. And I would send them--. One of the very important things for the Pueblo Indians, the Hopis, for instance, is parrot feathers, which they had a hard time getting. You know, those originally came from Mexico, and they traded turquoise for them in Mexico. In fact, one of the Indians that we knew down there, after the Gallup, New Mexico ceremonial he was driving to Mexico with a whole suitcase filled with turquoise, big chunks of it, to sell in Mexico, or to bring back Mexican dollars for trade, that sort of thing.

Riess: You were not exploiting the culture?

DeMars: I'm trying to think. I would hesitate--I wouldn't do my dance unless I was invited by them. And I would be a little embarrassed, almost, to do it for a large critical group that didn't know me, who I was or what the hell I was doing there. I would feel a little bit as though I might be exploitive. But I think in a sense most of my audiences would not be Indians, or would be a small group that knew me personally.

Right after we were married, about 1939, I had to show Betty my Indian country. So we drove down there. That's one of the times I saw Adam [Trujillo]. We had corresponded before. It took place through this--I was telling you about them passing a hat around. Betty and I had driven into Taos. I had an old cowboy hat on, we were all dusty and everything. And we were going to put up in the hotel there, which we did finally. But I heard sleigh-bells ringing. I said, "Hey, there's a dance going on someplace."

So we parked the car quickly, and we went into this little hotel, and here in a little lobby, so help me, were Adam Trujillo and two younger boys. And there was another man about his age. When they went to pass a hat, he came around to get a hat, and I handed mine out and he just took it and passed it around. When he came back it was the first time he looked at me. It was definite that he recognized me, but he didn't give me an embraso. Just a

slight smile, and said, "What are you doing down here?" I said, "We, we've come down. This is my wife." So he shook hands.

And then when he handed the hat back to me he said, "It will be a few minutes. Why don't you come up when the boys are dressed and see us." Betty thought she shouldn't go. I went up where they were dressing and he introduced me to the others. Then he said to them, "He knows some songs." He gave me the drum and asked me to sing for them. So here I am, singing a song that I'd learned about twenty years before. They were puzzled. The boys had never heard it before, but the other men with Adam began joining in. They began to recognize it and recall it. It was one they'd long since forgotten, something like singing "Yes Sir, That's My Baby" if someone says, "Sing," you know.

I think that's the first time I realized that there are new songs being done all the time, and they have just about the same categories that we do. That is, the sacred songs for the Eagle Dance and certain other things. Even for some of those it's almost like Mozart can write a new Mass, you see, and if it's catchy it'll be then used. Otherwise, they'll use the actual music that they're more used to. For the Pueblo dances they stop on certain beats and everything, so the new one would be like a minuet, or anything else that has definite steps that take place in separate parts of it. The new song would have to follow that, you see. Then the boys got it and they sang several others and they were laughing about it and so on.

I didn't go wandering around much in that total costume. That day was a festival day at the Rodeo and all that, but typically most of the Indians wouldn't be dressed this way anyway, because they'd be in jeans and coveralls and so forth. But for their Sunday best, it's the velvet jacket and the rest of the things. So with the others dressed that way, the others that didn't know me sort of--and there are some of them whose eyes are not as black as they are in this guy here, in fact I remember a couple of Taos Indians that really had almost blue eyes--well, you could see that there was a bit of a mixture there.

The English Club, "The Bacchae," and Betty

Riess: How did you get into the English Club?

DeMars: The English Club. Being now in the Arts Club, which I am, I can see that this is sort of the inheritor of the general spirit of the English Club, except the one difference is the English Club

had students in it, which I think was a lovely idea. It was great, you felt honored to be invited as a graduate. It was like an honorary society. I was in the architectural honorary fraternity, something or other. A little key. But I was not Phi Beta Kappa, nor did I get it in engineering.

Riess: The English Club was a great honor, you're saying?

DeMars: Yes.

Riess: Why were you chosen? Was it because of your Indian dancing?

DeMars: I'm just trying to think whether that was--well, I guess yes, it would have been known by them. But that didn't seem to be the reason. I think it was from the architecture school. Going down the list [looking at roster of members] I was wondering--well, Mike Goodman, of course, would have been in, and I guess I would have known him by that time. I'll have to go through and see if there are any other architects that are to be identified here.

I can remember being in the English Club a bit before the club did "The Bacchae," the first play. I think maybe I joined either still in school, or immediately afterward, when I hung on around the scene there, you see.

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DeMars: I remember at an inauguration dinner discussing the issue of here was the Greek Theatre, and there hadn't been a play done for many years. It seems to me that this was the discussion that preceded "The Bacchae." They thought it was time to use the Greek Theatre again. [Charles D.] von Neumayer was in the drama department, and they decided on "The Bacchae."

And then they had tryouts. Well, although I'd been doing this Indian thing, and I didn't mind being in front of an audience, I wasn't interested in drama or being in plays as such. A couple of times someone wanted me to be in a little dance group. We were going to have a demonstration doing the tango, and I was supposed to be Rudolph Valentino. I could do the tango, more or less, and sometimes at dances they'd play a tango, and I could do some of the little tricky steps, which I didn't mind doing. But for this I was supposed to actually take a cigarette out and stamp it on the floor, and that just wasn't me as a character, at all.

Now, when I'm being an Indian, I totally disappear into that character, in a sense. I wasn't interested in taking parts in drama, where I had to be some other thing. I could feel my ears burning red when I was supposed to be taking a cigarette out. I

didn't smoke anyway. I tried several times, and I always found it a nuisance, and not that enjoyable. But when they had tryouts for "The Bacchae" I thought it would be interesting. So I read a piece out of this, and so help me, I got the role of Dionysus.

I worked on that with some intensity. Garff Wilson has never forgotten it. When we were in Athens the first trip in '64, and sat in the theater of Dionysus on the slopes of the Acropolis, Garff was the cultural attaché, in a sense, telling the group that this was almost where theater was invented. "And of course, the theater was established to celebrate the rites of Dionysus, as Euripides memorialized in the play 'The Bacchae,'" he said.

"And we have Dionysus here! Come up, Vernon!" Well, here again, I don't usually embarrass easily, but I didn't really know what he was driving at, and then when he said this, I could remember about three opening lines. I just, "Oh, Garff, please, no," something. And so he gave it. [laughter] He knew the lines.

Just to follow up on this, when we were in Epidaurus on the trip this summer, here's Garff and here's this marvelous theater. They were demonstrating the acoustics, and our Greek guide, the lady, she was dropping some coins and little things, and people up in the top could hear them. The acoustics were so perfect. We got to talking about it, and I forget whose idea it was that Garff would give this opening speech from "The Bacchae," but he developed a terrible laryngitis kind of thing and I said, "Well, Garff, I'd do it for you, except I don't remember the lines. I remember some of them roughly. Suppose you stand by me and feed me the lines, I'll do enough of them so they can hear a spoken word." Dropping coins isn't very significant, and I do have a loud voice, apparently.

So we did that. I think later on he did another of these. But anyway, so there it was. The Epidaurus theater is quite marvelous.

Riess: The Indian program at I-House, and "The Bacchae," add up to a major involvement with theatrical productions, obviously very important in your career.

DeMars: And it was really, I would say, the first time where I really got to feel a part of the institution, and all these people who were interested in things that I was interested in, too.

I continue to follow with the Arts Club. Sometimes they're not all that interesting, but these are the kinds of people that I like to be with and enjoy. They [Arts Club] are music and drama

and architecture, art, and a lot of them are on this list here [English Club]. So it's really kind of a carry-through.

Riess: Were you known then as an architect particularly involved with the theater?

DeMars: No, I wouldn't say so. I was interested, but in such a tenuous way. I enjoyed the ballet and opera. I think that the only other--one summer Sam Hume gave a summer program using the Greek Theater. They did "Orpheus in the Underworld," and Betty did the costumes for it. This is after we were married, so it had to be in the forties. I guess it must have been postwar.

Betty had enjoyed ice skating, and wherever we were she usually joined a dance class someplace. Virginia Russ--she's on the list here, she was a dancer, and that's the Russ family of the Russ Building--she and Betty were very good friends, and at one point during our courting period, she and Virginia Russ decided to go to New York and seek their fortune. They both took classes with Martha Graham. Virginia did a dance concert in one of the theaters in New York, and she said she felt afterwards that Mary Wigman "didn't have to worry about her future." Betty was going to break into theater, costume design and so forth, because she had designed costumes for the Parilia, and she had designed much of her own clothes and made them. She had quite a nice sense of interiors, she did a room and all that.

Betty and my courtship was sort of on and off for some years, starting from "The Bacchae" where I met her. I guess first during the initiation dinner, and then in the meetings leading up to this production. But we didn't see much of each other. And then there was a party after "The Bacchae," and I thought she was the cutest girl there. That's when it started, you see. This had to be, if "The Bacchae" was '31 or '32, it was clear up to several years along there. We'd go to parties, and we would date. We had a couple of times when, for some reason or other, we were sort of on and off. She had quite a collection of boyfriends. But then we'd get back together again.

Betty was also an ice skater with the St. Moritz Ice Club. She would do the costumes for their yearly ice show, would design them, did several of them. They were quite imaginative.

Anyway, Betty was retained to do "Orpheus in the Underworld," the costumes for it. I helped her with the sets. She had this thing in mind, but I really designed the set pieces for the stage that were used in that. Then, as I said, she did, a little later on, the costumes for a new ballet that Christiansen had choreographed called "Winter Carnival" to some new music of

Strauss's--I don't think it Franz Josef, I think it was one of the other Strausses. Anyway, I did the sets for that.

Riess: So you were involved then in theater in this way, you're saying.

DeMars: But I wasn't invited. Well, I guess Betty must have told him I could do it, and so I did. But it wasn't an ongoing, constant thing. In fact, I doubt that I got paid for it. Betty certainly got paid for the costume design.

Then Betty was doing costuming for the Bohemian Club, and along about--have I touched on that before? the fact that at some point in here, in '33, I was made a member of the Bohemian Club, because they were doing an Indian play by Junius Cravens. And Henry Hadley, who had been the director of the San Francisco Symphony, he did the music. So I did my eagle dance in the Grove Play. But I was involved in some other parts. I was a member of the Bohemian Club until we left for the East, and then when we came back I didn't pick it up again.

Riess: [looking at photographs] You're showing me these pictures that show that you were still doing Indian dances in 1938, at the Bohemian Club. (I'm speaking for the record so we just get it down.) And then this is of you next to a really huge tepee that you took to Yosemite. You could fold this up and put it in the back of a car?

DeMars: Oh, yes, that just rolls up. Actually, of course, the circle ends up about here. It's not set up as a tepee, it was just being used as a backdrop. But I would say it went up to the top of the rail there, when it was a tepee.

Riess: You were saying that you had offers to take the Indian show on the road?

DeMars: Yes, I had an agent who had seen a couple of the things.

Did I show you this one?

Riess: No. "1933, Grove play. Vernon DeMars will be White Eagle. Written by Junius Cravens, stage designer and amateur playwright, the legend of Hani."

DeMars: And see who the singer was. I don't know if the name is one that you would know. [DeMars takes telephone call]

Riess: [reading] "John Charles Thomas, baritone, has the role of Hani, the first man, and Easton Kent that of Tala, the first woman."

DeMars: And I helped with some of the scene things up at the Grove, and so on.

Riess: Did people remain in the English Club after they graduated?

DeMars: Yes, it was sort of loose. I think it was such a nice idea that there were students as well as professors in this group. [looking at list] Here I see Stephen Pepper. A lot of these were professors. [C.D.] von Neumayer was the director. And Rose Wood was the mother of Pentheus, King of Thebes. She was the one who went up and tore his head off and brought it back, thinking she'd killed a lion in the play. It's a nice bloody affair.

Riess: In the English Club, what did you do when you weren't putting on a production? How structured was it? In the Arts Club, which is the outgrowth of the English Club, you say you do a little drinking and then you listen to a paper.

DeMars: Yes, and then someone is called the chronicler. He doesn't record it, but at the next meeting he gives a summary in his own words, usually a humorous one if he is capable of it. Then when the speaker gives his paper he appoints someone who makes notes and so on. Usually he chooses someone in his field who can be witty. And some of them are terribly good. For instance, David Littlejohn has been the chronicler a time or two. And he does it with a complete straight face and it just comes pouring out, the most biting criticism and so forth, and assumptions.

Riess: Is this published then?

DeMars: No, it isn't published. They keep the chronicle, but the paper itself, no-one asks for it. [laughter]

Riess: But in the English Club, was it similar?

DeMars: I think we had some similar things, because otherwise it wouldn't be an occasion for a meeting down there. But I don't quite recall. I remember the original dinner, and it seems to me that this black tie was very classy. We felt very much honored to be part of such a group.

III ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL

[Interview 2: December 12, 1988]##

Beaux Arts Training

Riess: How did you know you wanted to be an architect?

DeMars: I think I mentioned a high school art teacher. She saw something in what I did. I liked to draw, and I did it rather well. I was pretty good at seeing things as they were. I didn't go in for flights of fancy, particularly.

But as I said, she had gone through architecture, and her point was that you could go several directions with your learning, drawing and artistic things, and drafting, and these would give you possibilities, probably at least a job.

Riess: What was the department at Berkeley like? Did you get exposed to the brave new world of architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright and so on?

DeMars: No, you were introduced to the Beaux Arts system. There was no mention of--you heard about Frank Lloyd Wright from other students. I've often thought, in trying to think back, there were always two or three nuts in the class, already rejecting the classic architecture we were there to learn about--and of course, how to do it. They were the students who were absolutely all-out Frank Lloyd Wright admirers. I sort of took it as an interesting kind of aberration, but I didn't yet know about building buildings with Corinthian columns and things, you see.

Riess: My notion that you would want to do something fantastic and visionary is not correct, is it?

DeMars: Well, no, not yet, you see. Because, in fact--now, this is more inclined to be the current approach, in which you challenge their imaginations at the same time they're learning some of the trade. In ours, the trade consisted of learning what the orders looked

like that you were going to use, how to render, and descriptive geometry, and getting started on your mathematics, physics, all these other things coming in. But the main role in the design sequence is for a whole first year, and the first semester was doing what was called descriptive geometry. In other words, how you see a thing, in plan, elevation, and section. The thing itself is simply a line, or an object.

You did things like a cylinder penetrating a cube. That's where you project it to get the tracery it makes. If you were going to make it out of cardboard or something, you could actually do it in plan, elevation, and section, cut them out, and they'd all fit together. Or they'd be a rectangle penetrating a cone, or other such things like this. And you're doing drafting, and you're lettering in the explanation, and so you're learning these tools of the trade step by step. I had drafting courses in high school, which were much more complicated than that already. And I got A's in my high school courses. "This was awfully elementary," I thought. But I was interested that this is what you had to do to become an architect.

It ended up with shades and shadows, in which you're doing exactly the same thing. When you cast a shadow of an ionic volute, you see, on a flat wall here, that is a cylinder running at an angle penetrating the wall in that way, and you do it by plan, elevation, and section, keep referring back and forth.

And then the next semester was the orders. One whole semester this would be, five hours, three times a week, I guess. That was your main course. And by this time we had learned ink washes, and we ground the ink and all this sort of thing. And I found that rather fascinating.

Riess: But it's like vocational school, practically, as you describe it.

DeMars: Well, yes and no. It was simply one of the tools of the trade. Everyone had his own T-square and triangles and a plain or fancy set of compasses, dividers, and ruling pens. I still have mine--good as new. Then you had a little rectangular slate dish with a sloping bottom and a well at one end. The ink was a Chinese stick about three inches long, sometimes with a little gold lion on one end. All this was for running those graded washes. I don't really remember our instructors showing us how to do this. We just watched how the students that already knew how did it.

And then, let's see--did we start taking history courses and so forth? Well, that was just one course, you see. We had some other drawing courses, and then a one-unit course in pencil, pen

and ink--I mean, these are three different courses--pencil, pen and ink, and then watercolor. One unit. You took these almost clear on through. Later on, we didn't go to classes, we just did our sketches and brought them in, and they had this system--did we talk about this before? On the wall or off the wall?

Riess: No.

DeMars: The jurors were the entire faculty at that time, about eight people. And at the three times during the semester when the major design problems of upper-division students were being judged, also a collection of the watercolors and drawings were judged at that time. Oh, no, I think they had that at a separate time, because usually it took the entire exhibition here. Do you know, in the old building [Northgate Hall], do you know the exhibition hall?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: The jury'd start at one corner and go clear around the whole place. The drawings were usually 30" by 40" or bigger, and they were done on expensive paper, which was glued to the drawing board--really, the top of your desk--because you were going to end up in watercolor. Of course, you didn't do that until the last week or so.

Riess: Well, what does "on and off the wall" refer to?

DeMars: Oh! That referred to when they had the judgment for the drawings--sketches, pen and ink, watercolor--they were all hung with a couple of clips. There were wires on the wall here for them. There'd be three levels, and the place would be just filled with them from the whole school. The faculty, sometimes individually, sometimes in a group, looks at this. "Well, what do you think?" "Well, pretty good. I think that's a splendid one here." "I think that's worth a K," meaning "keep" for the department.

The next one, "Unh." Plunk. It was just pulled off the wall, and dropped on the floor. So after they go around--and some people might even look down and see something, "Hey, what's the matter with this one? I think it's pretty good." "All right, if you think so," you know. At the end of it all, that's "on the wall." You had to get a certain number of these things on the wall. If you could never get them on the wall, then you got a poor grade. If you had none on the wall, I think you would not have passed the course, because it's as though you hadn't come.

Riess: Did it end up making you competitive and secretive about what you were doing?

DeMars: Oh, not on this watercolor stuff, because that wasn't that competitive. A little bit of this later on in the major projects, because they were judged anonymously. Your name was in the lower right-hand corner, your name and the date, and then this was covered up with a sticker, and another--have you heard of the esquisse?

Riess: What does that mean?

DeMars: It just means a sketch. But I'll just digress for a moment here, because I think the Beaux Arts system, which we were ready to reject completely about the time I was a junior, or at least the direction--I mean, when we adopted modern architecture--I can see the failings of some of the things done now. I've seen it for some years, and I can see the other people discovering the same thing.

The modern idea is that the building is a result of a process of studying it, and all of the factors that are pressing on the solution of the problem, and you gradually work your way up to getting a plan that works, and you then consider alternatives, and then you try to perfect this, and so on. And you should be thinking in three dimensions. But it's hard to get a student who doesn't know how yet to do this. He needs a few more things solidly to hang onto.

Don Olsen just called me the other day about a course that he's giving for his graduate students, and he's so worried because they're really still working on the plan and so forth, you see. It's the last week of the semester practically. He can't get them to make architecture out of it yet.

The Beaux Arts people give you a very strict problem, and they have the loge, it's called. (Of course, Warren Perry and all of them were graduates of the Ecole. You were, if you're going to be anybody, in those days. And so all of the expressions are in French.) What they did, they gave you a program rather carefully spelled out, maybe even to the square footage of the different parts and so forth. They're given to you at 2:00 in the afternoon, and at 5:00, in three hours, you had a sketch of your plan concept of this, and also a sketch of what it's going to look like, and a section through it. So the explanation of the thing.

And then, their idea is that this is something which circumstances might have led you into as a concept. Maybe the client wanted it in that way, or if it was a certain site, you

could only accept it in that way. And the rest of the time, what kind of architecture were you going to bring out of it?

Then, you've got to work on it with the professor, and he found that it just didn't work at all. I mean, "You've got to do this," and so forth. But he also realized that you're somewhat stuck with this concept, because at the end of your three hours, or just before the end, over the sketch that you've finally worked out, in pen and ink, you traced over it on another piece of tracing paper, tried to be as vague as possible. Because this, then, is stuck in the corner of the final thing when it's in the exhibition hall, and this sticker that covers up your name laps over a piece of this to hold it in place, you see. That's the only identification. Of course, the professor of the particular course probably might recognize the students doing certain things.

Riess: But this little sketch--

DeMars: And it might be on paper about so big [4" by 4"], you see. They judge all these things, and they give them a grade. Then, they look at the little sketch piece, and if you departed from that sufficiently to show that you've had to give it up as a concept, because it just didn't work, then your grade is crossed off and they lower it one grade. The grades are not A, B, C, they were values. Twelve values was the highest, and six values was not very good.

Riess: Is this based on the Ecole system, also?

DeMars: Yes. And so a thing which had twelve values, even placing first or something, I think they'd leave it "placed first," but they'd cross out--there'd be eleven values.

Also your grade was lowered if it was late. They wanted you to learn to be able to be on time. A lot of it was based on the concept that architectural commissions were given by competition, and the competition was due in the mail at a certain time. If it got there five minutes later at the mailbox and is stamped that way, they don't open your entry. It has to be shown that it made the deadline; the deadline is very real in those cases. So they had a little man called the massier who walked through at 5:00 on a Saturday afternoon. He walks through with a little bell: "ding-a-ling-a-ling." As he walks through, you're in the midst of watercoloring the last of the thing, and you're supposed to drop your brush.

Well, you do, until he gets out of your class and goes down the hall to the next one. [laughs] So you hastily do a bit more, and he sort of winks at that a bit. Then, since they were all

wet, you would leave, and he would come later when it had dried out and cut the thing off the board, and he mounts it on a chassis, which is a great frame covered with manila paper, and then tapes it on with passpartout--that's gold tape. And if it looked like anything at all, it looked quite magnificent on one of these 4' by 5' frames, with your thing in the middle, all with gold tape around there. Of course nowadays, unfortunately, this is all out.

Riess: You said that the Beaux Arts system went out when you discovered the moderns, in your junior year?

DeMars: Yes. Because actually we didn't really get into much architectural design almost until then. It seems to me the second part of the sophomore year you had your first design projects, with very simple planning and so forth. And this was still very much the Beaux Arts thing.

Riess: They defined the problem completely for you then, and what architects do today is spend much of the time defining the problem, and then in the last rush, throw it into a form?

DeMars: Yes, exactly, really. They spent their time studying it. In fact, Maybeck tells the story, and this is repeated by Ken Cardwell, that when he went to the Beaux Arts there was a problem for a small monument, a commemorative little stele or something, intended to be ten feet high, or some such thing. And oh, he batted something out, and was very proud of it, and the professor came and said it was excellent. "Now, let's study it."

"What do you mean, study it?" "Well, this is a concept. Now, it might be this way, and it might be this way, and have you thought about a thing like this, and supposing we did this." It was a revelation to him, that the first idea wasn't necessarily the thing you should take as the last. And this is what the Beaux Arts people did.

An awful lot of our skyscrapers are due to the fact that it just started from here to there, and they just kept turning the crank in the thing, and this is what comes out the end. What it looks like depends on how much time or how much they want to spend on their draftsmen in the office to try an alternative. There are hardly any alternatives left by that time.

Riess: This could lead either to greater ornamentation, or greater simplification.

DeMars: Yes, that's right.

Riess: And so how do you know when to go one way and when to go the other way?

DeMars: Well, in school your professor tells you, I guess, how he reacts to it. And if you're argumentative, or if you really have certain feelings about it, you might convince him. I always tried to see what the student was trying to do, and if I felt he was going up a blind alley, I might let him do it sometimes just so he could find out for himself that way. Other times, I'd save him time, I'd tell him why I thought that that wasn't the direction to go in, but leave it to him to make up his mind.

I couldn't say, "No, this is wrong, you can't do that," and so forth, unless it was a flight of steps that--. I had one student arguing with me about that. He wanted to get this flight of steps into a place about half this long, because in plan, that's all the room he had. So he'd draw the little lines, and I wanted to make a cross section of it. What does it look like sideways? Well, he hadn't done that yet. But it didn't occur to him that there were rules about steps, and they are not that easily tossed aside. This hadn't occurred to him yet, you see.

Riess: But when you were a student were you intending to break away from the Beaux Arts, or were you delighted with it? How do you see yourself as a student?

DeMars: I think that we got persuaded that doing an elaborate palace for a foreign minister on a lake in the Swiss alps or something was not--. We began to be aware that there were problems in the world. Somehow we found out that there was a Frank Lloyd Wright, and we saw the magazines. Something seemed wrong about having functional things like shutters nailed to each side of the window of little houses. Why did you have to have them at all if you weren't going to use them? And so on. These kind of things, questions that never bothered me when I was in high school!
[laughs]

Riess: Let's talk about your professors. Did you have any classes with William Charles Hays?

DeMars: No, although I knew him. After I graduated, we became very close friends. But right there, I don't know that I had a design course with him.

Riess: Earle Cummings?

DeMars: Well, Cummings was a sculptor. His class was modeling, and doing clay, and so on. I don't think we did any drawing as such in that class, because we were doing modeling in clay. Nothing

tremendously inspiring about his instruction one way or the other. And I think I was more or less adequate in the thing. I think I probably got an A in it.

Riess: Ray Jeans?

DeMars: Yes. Now, he--again, some of these people I almost knew better later on. I'm trying to think what I took with Jeans.

Riess: What about Perry and Howard, and Michael Goodman, and Torossian?

DeMars: Torossian taught these beginning courses in descriptive geometry, and shades and shadows, and I think he did the course in the orders. I got along fine with him, I got an A in the course, but I could see that some students were having a hard time with it. He was kind of rough on them. His personality didn't sort of tolerate what seemed to be stupidity to him. [laughs]

Riess: Was he a very creative person himself?

DeMars: I don't know. I do remember something that impressed me very much. We were having lunch out on the architecture bench one day, and he had come out and sat down there, talking to a couple of us, telling how he had been to the symphony or something, and how moved he was by it, and what a mystery this was to him. I got into the conversation, I said I felt the same way, certain music, and I just can't imagine how one would have this come flowing out. I mean, a composer might do it.

We talked about this for quite a while, and he was very much interested in pursuing that. But I don't know quite what else he did. [telephone interruption]

Riess: Warren Perry?

DeMars: Well, Perry was very strong on the French influence. He was going to go all the way, we were going to get the real thing straight from the horse's mouth, in a sense. The first problem that was given was called a Pres Catalan. Now, I had never heard of it before, but the assumption was that anyone who's been to Paris knows what the Pres Catalan is, you see.

Riess: Well, I don't even know what it is, or how to spell it.

DeMars: [spells] It's a garden restaurant along the Champs-Elysses, among the trees. He wants a lovely kind of thing--well, like in New York, in Central Park, the Tavern on the Green. Now, that would be a Pres Catalan, you see. I don't think that is a generic term,

it's simply the one in Paris. So he wanted us to do that kind of thing.

But then he said something like, "Coserie intime will be the mode among the haute monde." [laughter] I thought, for God's sake. [laughter] And it went on, there were several other things. It was half-French and half-English. I think maybe it was a cute idea, because everybody thought, "What the hell is this?" And those who'd taken French, and so forth. He was just trying to get us into the spirit of it all, I guess. But a little bit later, when I caught the bug of modern architecture, I would refer to that as a ridiculous way to have students starting to learn about the real problems of the world.

I had a lot of fun doing that one. I had always been a great admirer of the work at the 1915 fair, you see. The horticulture pavilion, which was done by Arthur Brown, with this great glass dome, it had some entrances that were very elaborate, rococo. There were garlands, and all of this seemed to me to fit very much. So it was probably a good exercise. I just sort of lifted the whole concept. I'd modified it a little bit, but I found out that's what architects were doing at that time. So I had this as the main entrance. I had no dome on it, and I had a different kind of a glass, like a galleria thing. And then lots of trees and stuff. I thought it looked pretty good. So did he. [laughter]

Riess: Excellent.

DeMars: Then, let's see. Another problem he gave, and I can remember this, was a palace for Charles V of Spain. He sort of phrased it that he didn't have enough already, you see, and this was another little modest thing that would be about the size of two square blocks. So I had modifications on the Escorial.

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DeMars: We really were learning, and it was an exercise in if you copied--. Like the City Hall in San Francisco is not a copy of the Invalides in Paris, but the Invalides is obviously the inspiration for it, because there's no other dome with almost that exact kind of thing, and I think when you compare the two, the City Hall comes off much more completely realized, in a sense. The other has several little awkwardness about it. No particular element is lifted whole cloth; it's been an assembly.

But you're so knowledgeable about these, you're so much in them. Like an actress playing a part, it's already spelled out what the part is, but she can give an interpretation to it that

makes it great or not. I think this is sort of what the Beaux Arts people did, and they rather look down on anybody just copying something as it is, you see, without anything of themselves going into it. But to take something as a conceptual inspiration was quite satisfactory, and it fitted harmoniously with other things that were of the same sort. Now, we were a little bit inclined to not realize any of that until long later on.

Back to the judging, what happened was, we'd of course go up and see every time they'd have the judgments, even before we got into drawing some of the big design problems, after the secret jury meeting was over and the doors were thrown open. You hung around until the end and rushed in to see who placed first, and who got a medal, and all this kind of thing. There were two or three people, the Frank Lloyd Wright guys, who would try theirs out. They would sometimes get a little bit further up the line, sometimes down again. Never very far.

Then one time it was some kind of a project in which the [Bertram] Goodhue library for Los Angeles was the obvious inspiration. This placed first. This was the first time a thing won which was identifiably of the modern movement--we would have considered Goodhue one of the modernists, you see. In a year, you can begin to be rather informed about what's in the magazines, and what's being talked about, just among the students themselves. I don't know that we got lectured about this. In fact, they were rather tentative, the faculty. They hadn't come over yet. Anyway, maybe the other students who tried "modern" had been so poor in class in whatever they did that "modern" didn't have a chance. The faculty were fair on the juries, and they recognized that this was someone who knew what he was doing, and did it very well.

So, that was a signal. And I'd say overnight, almost, the ones who had been holding back, thinking that to get through this course and get a decent grade, "I better have more columns, or--." Oh, I would say it was one semester, almost, that it took to have this go through the whole school. And I could say that that was 1927.

In Perry's course--.. We would have three major projects during the semester. Now they'll give them one. These students in Don Olsen's class that hadn't been able to get to architecture yet, they'd be working on this all semester. In ours, we'd bat out a palace for a king in four weeks. But I had this palace, I had all the watercoloring and so forth, and Perry came around. It was nicely drawn up and so on, but it was getting a little heavy-handed in the watercoloring. He said, "Get a sponge with

water." He squeezes it out, over the whole thing! I went, "Aaah!" [laughing]

And then I think he said, "Now, let it dry a few minutes, and you can work on this corner here or something. I'll see somebody else and come back." So he comes back, and he takes the watercolor brush and shows how to do it over here, and so forth. He said, "Now, not too heavy back here." And he left me to finish it up.

Riess: That was very much the kind of teaching that you're saying you never would practice with a student?

DeMars: Well, yes. But it didn't hurt. And maybe it was a lesson, or something. Because it was too late; he wasn't going to get me the next semester, or anything. It was sort of done in good spirits, and I guess I had a certain awe. He was the dean as well, at the time. Besides, he really knew how to handle the brush and it was better after I followed his example.

Riess: Perry, at the time you were there, was only a figurehead dean. It was really John Galen Howard who was the power. And how about Howard as a teacher?

DeMars: Howard was very, very good as a teacher. I had him one semester, and then he died after that. I had him his last semester.

Riess: He died in '31.

DeMars: That would have been the time. See, my class was '29, but I was so fascinated with architecture that things like problem sets in physics didn't get turned in. I was interested in physics, but problem sets, you know, took a lot of time. And architecture took a lot of time. And so I just let it go, and it meant that I flunked a couple of times. [laughs]

Riess: Oh! Okay. So you entered in--you said you entered in 1925, then, and you didn't get out until 1931?

DeMars: Yes.

Riess: Oh. [laughs]

DeMars: And now, by '29, I had finished all the design courses for undergraduates, and I had had, I think, straight A's clear through. You were allowed at any time that you had a certain number of these values collected to go on and do graduate work, do some further work. So I took a sort of light load one time, and I finally got my physics, and I finally got through calculus. That

was another one! I took that during a summer session when I was working in the Boy Scout camp as a counselor, and driving to class, and then back to the thing which was more fun than doing calculus. I flunked that even after the summer session. I should have known better than that. I wasn't going to get my work done.

I finally got through that, because it was prerequisite for the engineering courses. I finally got through the engineering, and I found it interesting. And now that I didn't have all the other courses and so forth, I was able to give a bit more time and attention to it. But I really got through the engineering by the skin of my teeth.

Then I had to get my architectural license. And as a matter of fact, let's see, I had been doing work in Farm Security for years before I had a license, because the federal government didn't require it. Art Steiner and I decided we had to get our licenses, and so we took time off or something for about six weeks with an engineer in San Francisco who tutored. He had six students. We went three times a week for a two-hour session in the city, came back and all day long did the problem sets and things. I did nothing else. I got really quite deeply into it, and when the examination came up, I was one of the first people to walk out of the class.

Riess: Did it stick with you, then?

DeMars: Oh, yes. I mean, I had a feeling for the principles at an early stage, but again problem sets and things like that, and the exams--

Riess: What is it about problem sets, what turn of mind is it that you're saying that you don't have?

DeMars: Well, just, here's the problem, and it's going to take several hours to do it, and to work it out, and do the calculations, and whatever it might be. If I also had a design problem to finish or something--.

Riess: Yes, but the other students got it done. How come you couldn't?
[laughs]

DeMars: Well, it came more easily to them, I guess. And they didn't let little things like design distract them in quite the same way. But I really--I guess I have kind of a one-track mind at a given time. And I shouldn't lean on this, but I was so glad to find out from the creativity study, that other of my architect friends were the same way, and had similar careers where they could let all kinds of things go, to hell with the consequences, this is more

important. Of course, you can't go through life quite like that completely. [laughs]

Riess: Well, that's very interesting.

When you had the student judgments, did they bring in outside judges, or was it just the department?

DeMars: Just the department in those days.

Riess: They wouldn't bring in Maybeck or Arthur Brown or somebody like that?

DeMars: No, but they do now. These were not thought of as real, these were exercises. Now, there is sort of--I hadn't even thought of putting it in these terms before--but now their approach is as if you were actually working in an office, and this was a real problem. That's, I think, why the students are spending so much time on the plan to see that it doesn't have any bugs in it. Well, it doesn't matter if it has a few bugs in it, really, those will get worked out in due course, but not in this ten weeks, if you're going to have a building there as well as the foundations.

I've tried all kinds of devices, and so do some of the instructors, to get a due date--most of them do have something--a couple of stages of preliminaries. But sometimes you can't get the students off those into the next stage, or get them to be able to concentrate on their different--some of them are farther ahead than others, and others are still laboring along.

Riess: They're working on individual projects?

DeMars: We were all designing the same problem. And then these were judged in competition with each other, who has the best solution to that problem.

Riess: Is "best" always the most original? the thing that stood out? the most startling?

DeMars: Well, not necessarily startling because, you see, it wasn't quite as easy to startle in those times of the Beaux Arts thing.

Riess: But when you discovered Goodhue?

DeMars: Well, but then if you could do it as well as Goodhue appeared to--. Our professors would grant Goodhue his due. It never occurred to us to ask them what they thought of Frank Lloyd Wright. I don't think they took him that seriously. I think here

was kind of an oddball talented genius-type, sort of off the main track.

Riess: Were there others to take seriously, like the Bauhaus figures?

DeMars: Not yet. Not in the late twenties. This sort of thing was never even brought to our attention.

Riess: The Paris Exposition in 1925?

DeMars: Oh, yes. Interestingly enough, in my coursework with Howard he gave us three problems. The first was a perfume shop, and I think it was sort of implied that it might be in the manner of the Decorative Arts Exposition. We were into that a bit, and anyway, that's what I was doing.

I can remember this one little incident where he came around for the criticism. I had some sketches which he thought were promising, and I had tried them in color. It was rather large scale, because it was just the entranceway, and there wasn't much to it, you see--this was a short problem, like maybe two weeks at the beginning of the semester--and he said to me, "I'm sorry, but I can't understand; the plan and the elevation, I don't understand which is which."

I said, "No, I, well, I--this is what I want it to look like, and this is the way it has to be in the plan--and, uh--" and he said, "Well, you mean the plan and the elevation don't correspond?" "No, no." He said, "Well, then, it doesn't exist, does it?" I thought that was a good point. [laughter]

Other Graduates and Social Life

Riess: You referred to the Frank Lloyd Wright people in the class of '29. Did they go on to become fine architects?

DeMars: I don't know. Some of them mended their ways, perhaps. I think I do recall one guy that was able to temper it a bit. Usually, if they had caught the virus completely, they may have gone to work for other people for a living, but they never gave it up.

Riess: Did any of them go to Taliesin?

DeMars: I don't know actually of any of them there doing it, and I guess I didn't follow my colleagues.

Riess: Who were some of the outstanding graduates in your year?

DeMars: Loy Chamberlain had quite a practice--he's still among us. Mac Reynolds. I'm trying to think of who had leadership roles, other than being adequate professionals, you know.

Riess: I think if no one comes to mind then that's the answer to the question. [laughter]

Did you consider any other architecture schools?

DeMars: I think as schools went, Berkeley was probably considered quite good. I imagine some of the eastern schools were already more aware; with the closeness of Europe, and I think those influences coming in, probably things hit the fan sooner at Harvard, and so on. We'll have to ask Joe Esherick sometime about Penn.

The switch at Cal, I really think I could almost name that year, like '27 or '28. The Paris Exposition was one example that there was a new architecture coming, and elsewhere in the world that there was experimentation with trying to find--. And this was almost purely kind of a decorative thing, you see, which is the state it was in at that time. And then, of course, we became aware of what they now are calling Art Deco. Well, that sort of came from there. It was never called that in those days. In fact, it was called "moderne," in quotes, and you turned your nose up at it. And "modernistic" was another one.

Riess: Who did you hang around with in your class?

DeMars: Oh, well, several. One of them was this Art Steiner that I mentioned. And he had quite a nice flair, too. We were very close on sharing things.

Riess: The Ark was a very exciting and lively place to be, one hears tell. Is that where most of your life was led?

DeMars: Yes, it was.

I joined a fraternity about a year later, and it occurred to me much later that there were two bright guys in it, and I think that they needed, well, someone else to share their misery with them. One of them was the editor of the Daily Cal, and I don't know how he got there. The fraternity was called Achean, and I don't think any of these "birds" knew what it came from, and neither did I. We had a gruesome initiation thing. It was in a little building on Haste and College, clear across the campus from us.

Another member had been a Boy Scout friend, Gene Bell, also quite a bright guy. It turned out that those were the only guys that--the others were sort of beer-drinking, average College Joe, this kind of thing. I didn't do much drinking at that time. I learned a little bit later. I don't think this is a fraternity that rated very high in the social order of things.

To walk across the campus for lunch, you see, clear across from Northside to two or three blocks down on College Avenue, was a long, long walk. It was less of a pleasure all the time, and all of my friends were in the Ark, you see, because you're with them all day long, and so on. Finally, when the fraternity was going to go national and be absorbed by another one--and I've forgotten the name of the other one--but you had a choice whether to do it or not, and well, I chose not to do it, and so I got off the hook, you might say.

Then in my last couple of years, at least the last year and then maybe a year or so afterwards, when I was in the English Club, that group of people were my close associates. Plus still the ones in the architecture department. Let me see, who else among my colleagues there? Oh, Burton Cairns. This was Emmy Lou's [Emmy Lou Packard] husband. We got to be very closely acquainted. And Lucien Stark. And of course, when the Farm Security started, all these guys ended up on the drafting force, I mean, the ones that we thought something of.

John Galen Howard

DeMars: Can we backtrack for a moment to John Galen Howard's course, because I think it might be of interest, just to finish up that. We did this little perfume shop, or something. And I don't think I did very well on that. And then, the middle of the semester was a large problem, a sixty-story skyscraper for New York City, and it was under Howard. We got into all the thing of setbacks and the elevator systems. This was a graduate course, you see.

Howard and these people, they were not unmindful of what was happening along this line, just by the pressure of the way the world was going, and so on. So the expression of the building was quite an important one. The 450 Sutter Building, by Timothy Pflueger, had just been recently completed, and a little bit before that Pflueger had done the telephone building [Pacific Telephone Co. Main Offices, 140 New Montgomery St., San Francisco, 1924]. The telephone building is obviously inspired by the

Saarinen second place in the competition for the Tribune Tower in Chicago.

You know this story, do you?

Riess: No.

DeMars: Well, Raymond Hood did this modern skyscraper for the Tribune Building, and the design was quite literally Gothic. It's not the Woolworth Building, but the top ended up in flying buttresses to a set back central core, giving a very rich top to it, but it was a Gothic treatment. If you've ever seen this collection of entries, it's incredible, there were hundreds from all over the world. Some of them had an Atlas standing with a world on his head, and elevators inside. There were some weirdies and there were some jokes.

The second prize went to Eliel Saarinen, and there were some decorative elements that he used that kind of suggested Gothic, but not. I mean, they were vertical, but there was no literal ornamentation. Whereas the Raymond Hood thing was quite literally a Gothic building. Gropius had an entry--. And incidentally, his entry was shown in the San Francisco show of Chicago architecture recently, and it really looked terribly empty of much inspiration.

Riess: We're getting way, way off.

DeMars: All right, yes.

So anyway, I did it, in the manner of the 450 Sutter, but sixty stories and following setbacks and all the rest of the things. Howard was really quite interested in it, and very helpful. And almost the last night, I think it was, I worked rather late, and someone said, "Hey, we're going to a movie," or something. I said, "I've worked hard enough. I want to go with them." I did, and I came back and worked the rest of the night, and got it in.

When Howard saw me the next day he said, "I just hardly slept last night, I was wondering about whether you worked out the such-and-such thing." I thought, my God! if he had known what I had done. Anyway, I placed first, got a medal, and then got a fifty dollar prize at the end of the semester for a design problem.

Riess: Wonderful!

DeMars: Someplace I have a little xerox of the design of the thing, and it looks quite impressive.

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DeMars: The last problem--the heavy one was in the middle, you see--so as to give us a little something to ease up on, it was called a dream castle. The explanation, a very short paragraph, is that this expedition has fought its way through the jungle, and finally come out at a clearing, and there's a great lake, and they see this castle on the top of a rocky promontory, or whatever. And on this one I was sort of taken up by I think it was something called Tales of Mystery and Imagination by [Edgar Allen] Poe. I forget who did the drawings, but there were all kinds of imaginary creatures.

Well, I worked some of them into the picture, and I had the riders on horses and camels coming through a jungle, with monkeys in the trees, and other kinds of things. The castle design was a combination of Lhasa, I think some of the Hindu temples, a little Gothic, all kinds of things, on the top of this great cliff. The leader is stunned by this apparition.

I hadn't really finished it when the little man came with the tinkle bell. I thought, "Oh, what the hell, I'm going to get this done." More watercolor went on, and he came and shook his head afterwards, "Well, well." So he had to write a little "L" on the border.

So what happened? I got first place, twelve values, a medal. And then I think they crossed the medal off, crossed the twelve values off to eleven, because of the "late," you see. [laughs] But they still placed me first, so I didn't care.

Riess: Well, that's good.

DeMars: So that was the Howard experience. He was the one who gave our history courses, too. I had them. I think we went through a couple of years of the ancient and medieval and so forth, maybe it was three semesters, maybe they lumped it into those three. I think it was just a one-unit course.

Contemporary and Residential Work

Riess: Did anyone take you out on expeditions into the city, or to southern California?

DeMars: No. It just didn't happen that I recall. I think there might have been a traveling scholarship at that time, but I don't recall

any of them taking us out to see things going on, because they assumed that we could get over to the city and see the City Hall, and they were quite right. We could have. And they couldn't have said, "Well, there it is. See those columns? What are they?" You know.

Riess: How about buildings on campus? A few things must have been going up then. An agriculture building, the Life Sciences Building?

DeMars: It's strange. Maybe the Life Sciences I saw going up, because I remember the glue molds and things for the sculptural things. So I must have been observing that. What was the first one you mentioned?

Riess: One of the agriculture buildings was built around that time. And Cowell Hospital, I believe.

DeMars: Cowell may have been. And yes, they should have said, "Go up there and watch the steel frame," and so forth. But no, I don't think they did.

And as a matter of fact, on our drawings we were told to leave quite a bit of space, on the cross section, between the ceiling and the roof, because the engineers would fill that in, and they would tell us how much space to leave in. Sometimes it was a whole story. In a building of this sort, it would feel like it ought to be almost equal to a story height, you see. Well, there'd be trusses and duct work and things, you know.

And then, do you know what poché is? The term is still used. On a plan, it's the blackened-in areas that represent the thickness of walls and so forth. Now, you can see what it would look like in a space like St. Peter's, where you could put a corner church into the poché of one corner of the part holding the dome up. And the idea was that in masonry, the taller whatever goes on top, the higher it is, the thicker the walls have to be at the bottom.

So partly you could read from the plan what was going on above. If it was a tower you would see very thick areas in the poché. And usually that was blacked in with India ink. And that was even thought of as an art form, almost in itself, that you could kind of read the implications of this.

So when you got into modern architecture, with a steel column that might be so tiny, it hardly made any poché at all. San Francisco City Hall would have those great thick corners, like in St. Peter's. There might be a stairway inside of it, going up through it, but there would be literally great hunks of solid

stone, like building a dam, to hold up this great thing. And of course, it was very thick because there was pressure of the dome going outward.

All of that was discussed in a way by implication, but the engineering--you didn't get into really the calculations of this. And even in the engineering courses, you sort of learned the pieces and parts, but not much analysis of the whole thing, and what was implied by it.

Riess: You were living at home during the first years you were at the University?

DeMars: I lived at home until I guess the last couple of years. At home was in East Oakland finally, East 23rd Street, not very far into East Oakland. Betty lived about four blocks away; we never met until we graduated.

Riess: And then the last couple of years, are you saying you lived on campus?

DeMars: I lived in a little basement place on the corner where Etcheverry Hall is now. There was an old Victorian house there that had a dank, dark basement, just a little suite that I heard was available. It had a little living room, and I guess I mostly ate out when I was there. I think I went home on weekends to get a decent meal.

Riess: You were very close to the Ark.

DeMars: Right across the street. And that was sort of my first time away from home. I remember once we were in the midst of a problem, or getting toward the end of it--I remember Burt Cairns was among them--I was in the graduate room down there working, and they banged on the window outside and said, "Vernon, so-and-so's got a jug of red wine! C'mon, we're all going to get drunk!"

It was explained that none of them had been drunk before, and they thought that they ought to just do it. So I thought, "Well, I haven't either, so all right, I'll do it." I didn't quite, but a couple of them got sick as a dog in the process. [laughs]
Drinking wasn't really as common.

Riess: Well, it was Prohibition, wasn't it?

DeMars: Gosh, I guess it was. That would have had some influence on it, yes. But I think it wasn't quite as widespread popular. Now, I guess, every student has had a drink or two, and I think it

doesn't hurt them. They should have courses in drinking or in-- what is the word?--not abstinence.

Riess: Moderation?

DeMars: Moderation, yes. That would be a good idea, not just learning it from your fraternity brothers.

Riess: Do you ally yourself with the class of '29 or the class of '31?

DeMars: I have allied myself with '29 since that was my first class, and since the bear [gilded statue of a bear in Lower Sproul Plaza, class gift of 1929]. I guess in one sense my friends that I went through college with were in the class of '29, even the architecture ones. Then they graduated or went on into graduate school, so we would have still been the class of '29 graduate students. I didn't make brand-new friends particularly in those last couple of years because--I took more design because I wanted to, but I finished off all of my other courses, except for engineering and so on. I had more time to give to certain things.

Another thing that we didn't learn is much about the construction of anything as simple as a residence. We had a course called stereotomy--its level of importance you could tell by the fact that it was a one-unit course, I think, one semester or so--in which you made drawings of stud walls, with the X through the thing representing a two-by-four, you know. And I learned that you had to have two of them on the top of the plate, so-called. It didn't even occur to me particularly to go and watch a house being built and check those out. They should have led us by the ear, or something. I did it enough to pass the course.

Now the students actually do little models of them, which I think is right. In those days we could have worked that in someplace.

Riess: As students did you have any contact with William Wurster and Gardner Dailey?

DeMars: As students we were already aware of their work, beginning to be, and admiring it. That's why we felt this was the way to go, and the notion of nailing shutters on each side of a window just wasn't going to be our thing.

I can remember, I was still a student when I just thought that there's no turning back. I mean, it's got to satisfy the criteria of functionalism and so forth. It's got to work, and wherever this leads you, that's what's got to happen. [with

emphasis] It wasn't until years later that I thought one might look back and see if there weren't some things that we should have learned from it.

I think if they had explained it better to us, why we were doing it the way we were doing it--. I should think they could have taken us into their confidence to that extent, the Beaux Arts people. Of course, they thought they were training us to do city halls, and so forth.

Riess: When would you see Wurster and Dailey?

DeMars: Well, we knew their work.

Riess: From publication, or would you run around and look at the new houses?

DeMars: Oh, we'd go around and look at the new houses, yes.

Riess: Did you visit architectural practices in the city, maybe, to see how they worked?

DeMars: When I wanted to get a job, I did. Of course, we were so unprepared for going into an office from our training. It was in no way an apprenticeship for doing what anyone would trust you with in an office.

Riess: But they'd been graduating underprepared future architects for years.

DeMars: Yes, true. Currently I think there's much more feeling that what they're doing in design and so forth, and other courses, is going to give them some usefulness to an office to start in with. And the good ones are learning drafting and can be turned loose to do it. They can certainly do a site plan. We'd never done one for anything other than around a city hall, that kind of scale of project--I think they're better prepared to get into it now.

Schools like San Luis Obispo [Cal Poly] put most of the emphasis on turning out a useful draftsman for an office. I think they've done more than that in recent times. But all the offices say they can put them to work right away. So that means that there has been less attention given to some of the broader things.

The Depression and the New Graduates

Riess: Because jobs were so scarce in 1931, did some of your fellow graduates completely leave the profession?

DeMars: Well, one of them, a close friend, Jack Mitchell, he was from Santa Barbara, and we traveled together at the end of our junior year. I'll tell you about that. But when we got back he got his degree at the end of the four years and went back to Santa Barbara, and there was just no work to be done down there. So he started working as a hospital orderly and mowed lawns and did other odd jobs for quite some time.

Then what finally happened, in about the middle of our first year or second year of Farm Security he'd been working so much in hospitals, and he got rather interested in layouts of hospitals and things, and we were doing clinics, so we wrote to him. I guess he must have been working as a draftsman, so he had some skills, so we put him to work on our staff in San Francisco for a while, consulting on some of the clients and the first hospital we did in Arizona. I think it ended up that he finally did enough work in architects' offices and things, as a draftsman and as a consultant, to put himself through medical school. He became a doctor.

But that trip we took, sometime in our junior year we got jobs as ordinary seamen on a Nelson Line freighter. He knew somebody that knew somebody. Ordinary seaman is the lowest of the low. We were on watches, and this kind of thing. We went around to New York, through the Panama Canal. We got into a hell of a storm off the coast of Mexico. It was a ship with a lumber load, and we were tightening up the chains and cables to keep the load from shifting, and battening down the hatches, and all this kind of thing. I don't think there were many precautions from getting swept overboard, and it occurred to me several times it wouldn't have been hard.

And we were being sort of beat around like a piece of dirt by the way in which the first mate--never anything physical, but we'd be sitting around on the deck after lunchtime and so forth, and he'd say, "Come on, move along, quit dirtying up the deck." [laughs] He must have known we were college kids, though we tried to hide the fact. The language that some of these sailors used was just incredible. Every third word was a four-letter word, you know. It took so long to just make a sentence. Modified, "This goddamned so-and-so." "I told him, so-and-so." Each one had three expletives to introduce it, so that you could boil it down

to a very short statement. But we tried to go along with all this.

Well, anyway, it took two weeks to get to New York through the Canal, and we decided that we weren't going to take the trip back. But because we had expected to ship on for the trip back we didn't have all that much money, so we decided we'd hitch-hike across the country. We thought that maybe if we looked sort of neat and clean we'd get a ride, so we wore white knickers. You know, what they wore for golfing and so forth. It sort of helped in the East, up about to the Rocky Mountains. And then the rides began getting fewer and fewer. There were times when we had a hard time getting a decent ride all day long. So we saw a good deal of the country that way.

Riess: How did you eat?

DeMars: Well, we had enough money--yes.

One time we were picked up, and the guy said, "I'll take one of you," and he took Jack. It took me some time to get a ride, and we were going to meet someplace else. This one said, "You gotta gun?" I said, "No!" He said, "Okay, get in behind the wheel." He wanted someone to--well, he'd give me a ride, but if I was behind the wheel I couldn't very well either stick a gun in his side or pull anything fancy. I think he might have welcomed a relief driver for a while. We got sort of reasonably well acquainted, and that got me halfway across Arizona or something. He was cordial, but I thought that was a rather good way to do it.

Riess: But back to graduating into the Depression market, did it feel terribly upsetting and discouraging?

DeMars: Well, it got to be a little bit, because you were wondering what's going to happen. My family wasn't well off, and it wasn't easy. My father had an automobile shop, car repair, which he owned with another man, but he did the work. They had some help. I talked to you about that. But we were not on easy street, middle class, and it was a worry. My work in camps, and so forth, was one of the few income things that I could find.

Then I did do my first house, which is in north Berkeley. This was maybe as early as '32 or '33, someplace in there. I worked as a carpenter on the thing at the same time, and the contractor said, "Well, that's kind of funny. You're telling me what to do, and then I've got to tell you what to do." I tried to tip-toe through it. It's on Keith Avenue, and it's there to be seen.

Riess: Who was it for?

DeMars: It was for Selma Moravic. I don't know how I met her, or how they knew about me, or whatever. I think the house cost all of \$3500, or something. It's a hillside house, two-car garage, two bedrooms, a little sun deck on the top, a living room, a dining room, a breakfast room--it's quite an affair. How the devil--when you think of what things are costing now!

Monument Valley Rainbow Bridge Expedition, 1934##

Riess: You were a member of the Monument Valley Rainbow Bridge Expedition. How does this fit in with the Indian interest?

DeMars: Well, the way it fitted in was simply that--and I think his name was Ansel Hall in the National Park Service--does that ring a bell?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Well, after graduating and so forth, I worked for the Park Service under Ansel Hall for maybe a year in 1933. That was the PWA period. And my job was on the staff doing museum illustration work. We were located in a building west of the UC track stadium, at the head of the street there, behind where the Extension Division is now.

My illustrations were for four National Park museums. One of the series, for instance, was done in watercolor, and it was the love life of the frog, starting with the tadpole and going around through the whole cycle and meeting a fellow frog, before they can make new tadpoles. People liked them. I've had them say, "We saw this thing in Montana! Didn't know that you did this," or something. In fact, it seems that they could have reproduced it or something and used it in several places.

The National Park Service had funds to do this kind of work. So I did a whole series of things, all rather small. I've never seen myself where they ended up. Some were on the Indians. One was on the Coronado expedition, showing the soldiers being attacked by Indians, and we had someone coming around who said, "Now, the armor was this way, and they had these shields," and so forth and so on. "And the helmet was shaped this way, and no, that spear is wrong--."

Anyway, this led later, after I had worked there, and they knew I was also an architect--but that wasn't what I was working on there--to this expedition. They'd had one the year before that went to that area of Arizona.

See, they assembled a group of people to explore this area the way Lewis and Clark did the Northwest. The maps at that time showed quite a large area in the Navajo reservation, on the outskirts of it, as being unmapped, so we had a group of surveyors who were doing this. Then there were a couple of biologists studying any notable wildlife. The archeological things were identified, but never carried much further than simply the fact that "in this canyon there were two or three cliff dwellings."

They had a clue to some possible cliff and other dwelling sites, and they did actually discover something called the pit houses, the predecessors of kivas, under a kind of overhang. Also the week before I got there they had discovered a cave with a burial site of the Basket Makers, with about seven or eight graves in it. It was very exciting, it was way up in the cliff. Someone discovered what looked like holes cut in the rock, you see. They were all filled with sand and dirt and so forth. They found they could brush them out, and climb up higher and higher up the thing, kind of scary, but these were actually the access way to get up to this site.

Riess: And you did the drawings of the site?

DeMars: Yes, measured drawings of the end of the canyon we were in, Twin Caves. These finally ended up in a museum in Arizona.

Riess: Did you camp when you were there?

DeMars: We camped in this canyon, Tsegi Canyon.

Riess: Were you outfitted and taken care of by the Park Service?

DeMars: Yes, we had a cook, and we had a permanent camp. We'd go out from there. We had some people doing the wildlife survey of this area, ecological and plant things that were different from elsewhere.

To survey this cliff dwelling I had to have a plane table. I could do it alone, but once in a while I needed an assistant, and it took about an hour to get up there from where our camp was, and it was a slightly scary climb, the last part, because part of it had fallen away, and you had to go up part of it on these sort of steps. I think we tied the tripod and the plane table to a rope and went up, and then hauled this up afterwards, because you couldn't carry it over one shoulder and climb up this thing.

There are two huge cliff dwellings, Keet Seel and Betatakin. Twin Caves is not as big as Betatakin, but it was about, I don't know, a hundred rooms or something. Really sizable. And the end of the canyons where the water would come over would keep spalling back, you see, in the formation geologically. And this talus slope coming up. And so here's the cross section through this section, it would be this slope starting this way and going clear up to the top. I'd say five hundred feet down to here, three hundred maybe, no, more than that, because after you climbed up, here's where the thing is, way back in the crack. Waterfall over the top, when it would be raining, big streaks coming down, but no water ever hitting this cave site. It was a very good place. No one could attack them from the rear.

But on days when I'd go up there alone to do some things, I'd get kind of spooked out after a while. Here are all these little houses, and there were the grinding stones in place.

Riess: It hadn't been looted?

DeMars: About 1913 the first expedition came there, and there had been maybe a couple of visits since then, but it was so remote that no tourists or anyone could find their way in.

We found one thing, a little granary in a corner, all stone, but with mud holding it together. It had a slab over the front of it, as a door, and then kind of a willow thing with a wood stick through it. Now, this dates from the tenth century, because the site was abandoned about that time. We took it off, and inside there were corncobs, from where the rats had gotten through cracks, mice and things, eating the corn off, but the cobs were there. And then there was a little pole, a pine sapling that had been cut off with a sharp axe, and in pencil, the names of all the people on this 1913 expedition standing in the corner. I wouldn't say those were the last ones there, but everyone else had left it. They'd removed some almost intact pottery and things. But we found lots of broken pottery they hadn't bothered carrying out.

So that was that expedition, at the end of which I took off with a young wandering fellow who would have fitted right into the present flower people and the students who were taking the big trip. He would have been college-age--I don't know if he was or not. We got kind of acquainted. He had a burro and all his cooking equipment with him. He was just crossing the desert with this thing. He stayed on. Could he work for them? and so forth, get a job? So they put him on.

##

Riess: What in you responded to Indians? Or Indian dancing?

DeMars: It caught me early, I suppose. The Boy Scout introduction was the way it got started. And then, when I saw the real thing, it was better than I--I had enough background from the Boy Scouts to think, here was this thing--.

Riess: When you were doing a dance, did you really feel like an Indian? Did you feel like you had merged in some way?

DeMars: I think that I was able to feel that way in some of them to as great an extent as many of them who dance today do, certainly. I'm sure the ones who were thinking that they were influencing the spirits and that this would make it rain or whatever, I wasn't having that kind of thing.

Riess: Well, that's a good point. Do you think that you could have made it rain?

DeMars: No, because you see, I'm rather pragmatic about these things. I guess I am a complete agnostic about thinking that one can influence things, or be influenced by things like astrology. I have a scientific mind to the extent that I'm from Missouri, you have to prove it. When we can go to the moon and see this little ball down there, that's all the things that concern us. The vast reaches of the universe--I just can't see God having time--and how big is God in all of this thing? I guess I'm a skeptic.

I think the word atheist sort of means almost an aggressive kind of nonbeliever. I have no doubts in my own mind that there's nothing you can influence by prayer. I don't even believe in the Big Bang. I don't find it a satisfactory explanation, you know about the origin of the universe expanding from that. I almost want to take these guys and say, "Look, there can't be a nothing before the Big Bang." And I can't see it all the size of a baseball because it's so compressed.

One of my good friends in the Department of Astronomy here, Dave Cudaback, I started asking him this question. I said, "What are you hypothesizing?" He said, "We don't hypothesize about things that we can't do anything about." I think that's the way he put it. But it seemed to me that's a very important thing. If they hypothesize back to the Big Bang, I would think that someone would say, "Okay, now what happened before the Big Bang?" Now, maybe they have an answer, and maybe I haven't asked the right men.

Return and Recovery

[Interview 3: January 4, 1989]##

Riess: In about 1934 you are finally put in touch with what turns out to be your life's work, it seems to me. You started in the Rural Resettlement Administration?

DeMars: No, not yet actually. See, '34 was when I was on that expedition in Arizona. So '35 I must have come back. I remember that date very well because '34 was the waterfront strike in San Francisco, in which they actually had the troops out and so forth, and I think a couple of guys were killed. It was real serious business. Betty wrote me about it while I was in Arizona. I think we were down there, it seems to me it was four to six months or so. I can't imagine why we'd be gone quite that long, but it certainly was at least three or four months.

Did I tell you about picking up something which was felt to be Rocky Mountain fever, my maybe getting bitten by a tick or something?

Riess: No.

DeMars: I remember I had a blow-up mattress and a sleeping bag up under a rock overhang. Most everybody was sleeping around in various heaps--like homeless, you know. [chuckles] I think that this could have been by a tick or something like this. We got through the summer and everything else--and how did I get back? My first trip to the Southwest in '28 I had hitchhiked from here. My mother let me do it. But this time I guess I went by train.

I stopped to see some family friends in San Diego on the way home. They had an exposition there, and there were some Indians at the exposition, and I thought I'd try out my Navajo. I saw a group of them, they obviously were Navajos, at this thing. I said, "Ya-te hey shadanyi," which means, "Hello, brother-in-law." I thought it just meant "good friend" or something, you see. And my accent must have been reasonably correct at the time, because he turned around and said, "Ut-chi-ky-ya!" [continues speaking a rapid-fire, mumbled set of Navajo words] And I said, "Oh!" [laughter] That's as far as I could go! But much laughter went around, because I just had said enough that they thought I knew the language.

That night I remember I was slightly unwell and I seemed to have a little fever. Well, they got me on the train and I got

home. And then I went to bed with a high fever for several days. It was 102, 103, that sort of thing.

Riess: Were you with your parents when you came home?

DeMars: I was at home with my parents, yes.

Someone I had done a house for, Selma Moravic--her brother was a doctor. And he had come up with something called bacteriophage. This was before penicillin. They took a culture from your nose, or someplace where it would contain the germs, and they actually ground it up mechanically and destroyed it. This way it was not active, but somehow or other its atoms or whatever else made it up made it workable. It was a new anti-toxin kind of thing. It seemed like a very interesting idea, so they tried it on me. I became an experimental subject. And after a while I got better--and not very long, maybe a couple of weeks or something.

But what happened, this would recur. At first it was recurring every few months. Then it got to be about every six months. Finally it was about a year apart, and then it finally disappeared. Though to my great consternation, at one of the Parilias, you know the Beaux Arts balls, I had been working on some of the sets and so forth and I just came down on my ear on this thing, so I missed it.

IV FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Burton Cairns and the Local FSA Hierarchy

Riess: In Roger Montgomery's chapter in Bay Area Houses¹ he talks about Burt Cairns, "who headed a small team of engineers assisted by a few architects and a lonely landscape architect or two." Why were engineers at the top?

DeMars: He was probably describing the Farm Security Administration; these would be the civil engineers, and construction engineers in the sense of the mechanical, electrical, structural, and so forth. They almost of necessity had to be subservient to architects who were doing the planning for the buildings. But they also dug wells, they surveyed the sites, they had people that went out and actually optioned the land that was going to be used.

Burt may have been involved in a bit of this, but that was in the hierarchy of things--I'm sure that the need was recognized in a certain place, they must have talked to people, I suppose the mayor of the town, the real estate people, what land was available that could be bought, piece of property and so on. Burt may have been involved in some of that, although I don't think that he was an engineer.

Riess: Well, it sounds like up a certain point everything was unarchitected.

DeMars: Yes, sewage disposal plants, and tanks and other facilities for three or four hundred families, you see. This gets to be beyond septic tanks and so on.

Riess: Would an engineer have said he needed an architect, or did they really not need architects for these little houses?

¹Bay Area House, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 231.

DeMars: You let an engineer design them, and they didn't know a damn thing about designing houses.

Joe Weston in Los Angeles was the regional architect with a small staff down there. And they were doing houses, part of the same program that did subsistence homesteads, and so forth. This was one of Mrs. Roosevelt's things. And they were doing this in southern California. But it was being done by this [Rural] Resettlement Administration of Rex Tugwell's.

For the most part, at least in the East, it was thought of not so much as an engineering problem as an architectural problem, craftsmen anyway, to do these little houses in the Appalachians, farm houses, and there were a few barns and things. All of these were really buildings. In fact, I don't think an engineer got within miles of the Appalachian things, because there was no plumbing. They had a well in the back yard, they just hired somebody to drill this. You went out to the pump for water, and you had a privy.

However, they were doing real houses in southern California. And I don't know quite how far along that had gone when we got into it-- you might even say when Cairns's father-in-law got into it, Walter Packard. That's when the regional office was established in Berkeley. Whether before it had been dispersed-- I don't think it was centralized out of Los Angeles, but the activity had started down there. And I believe the state had done the first couple of these camps, one in Marysville that's talked about.

The first time I'd seen the pictures in the little book there, it looked like nothing we had anything to do with. In fact, it looked quite cozy [chuckles], like a state park or something, a campground. And that was the prototype. The one at Marysville, the pictures look as though it's in among the trees, they're already there and so forth. Down at Weedpatch there were no trees anyplace. We planted some. But when we came in, the main buildings were already built, like you'd find in Yosemite or anyplace else--men's and women's toilets and showers and laundry on the outside.

Riess: And tent cabins?

DeMars: At that particular point I don't think they had any such yet, they just had little plots marked off. Then I think maybe they had a wooden floor. Maybe they had a tent platform. But there was no place to tie the ropes to, and your tents were all different sizes. The little ones on the tent platform, of course, the water ran in from the outside and so on.

Riess: Who supplied the tents?

DeMars: The people brought their own tents, they just brought whatever they had. And when we first went down and saw the things, it seemed to me, what we thought, they needed a piece of shade. We built a little thing called a ramada, on four posts, and lattice work above. At one end it was kind of a piano box which had a shelf here and a shelf under it and a couple of shelves above. That was your kitchen, a place to put the kerosene stove and some things, just an open shelf. It was at least a thousand percent better than putting it on the ground. We had rails to tie the tent ropes to on each side.

We planted trees immediately. And down the middle of two sets of these tent platforms ran a water line with a water faucet every so often. The roads on the outside were graveled and you could park the car in front. I've got some photos of it.

##

Riess: Let's take a quick step back. You had been working for Clarence Mayhew?

DeMars: Yes, and I found it a little bit boring and I guess it didn't suit my--I didn't exactly have an exploding ego to do my own houses or something. If I had a house to do I would have done it different than Mayhew did. So my job was not to plan his things or work as a draftsman. Only because I drew rather well, I was making renderings of houses that he designed and was going to build in Piedmont. These would be quite eclectic, maybe Spanish or whatever people wanted. They could have a Shakespearian one or an old Southern mansion or whatever else, and then I rendered it.

I felt there was something kind of sleazy about me doing this. I didn't really know. I didn't mind it too much except I found it kind of boring to not be actually designing the house. I was just all alone in this one place, and I'd even have a hard time keeping awake during the day sometimes. So when this other thing came up [Rural Resettlement Administration], Burt Cairns phoned me. They must have just gotten started.

Riess: You had no developed social consciousness, shall we say, at that point, you've said. But Burt Cairns did. Where did he get that?

DeMars: He must have had more contact with Walter Packard, whom I had not met up to that time. And it seems to me--I can't quite figure when I met Emmy Lou, his wife, or when they got married. I wasn't at their wedding or anything. But Burt and I were very close. At one point--this is going back--I guess I had just graduated, and

we together rented a house, one of these backyard houses in Berkeley, and did some little odd jobs. That would have preceded all this other. But I think he was going with Emmy Lou at that time.

Riess: They got married in '34.

DeMars: Well, that might have been while I was away in Arizona. But I'd almost forgotten this earlier time.

Riess: What were the odd jobs you were doing?

DeMars: I remember we did a house. Maybe he got the job from a woman who had just married a football player. She was a little older than he was. And they bought a fine lot out in Orinda. They liked Spanish architecture, so we were going to give it to them. It was a very nice house.

Riess: The two of you were a little firm?

DeMars: Well, yes. I didn't have a license then. One of the things you had to do on a sign, you can say "designed by," I think. You can't say "architect," you see, or "architecture by," you can't use the word "architect." Later on they even got so you couldn't use the words "designed by." So in our blueprint sign there were some problems. I was well along in Farm Security and had a lot of projects under my wing before I got my license.

Then I think at that same time--I was trying to figure out when we would have done this other thing. Burt, it seems to me, was living with his mother or his aunt in Palo Alto. And he got a job to do a commercial drug store and a living quarters above it, and so on, down by the main highway, the one that's closest to the bay. I think it's there on 101, if they haven't torn it down by now, which they may have. But it was a little corner thing. I think it had another store, a drugstore, and a living quarters above. We did that and it got built. So that took care of a little time in there. And that had to be before all this happened. In other words, we had been students together.

He would talk about some social problems and things a bit. But I can't quite remember what--of course, we talked about the state of architecture.

Riess: Were Burt Cairns and Walter Packard close to being what you would describe as socialists?

DeMars: Yes, I would. They were sort of intelligent pragmatists about the thing. See, Walter Packard--maybe you know this part of the

story?--had been involved in the development of a little sort of cooperative community down in the valley, Delhi.² That was an attempt to do a collective of some sort. They were going to farm some land with a community.

Riess: And in fact one of the thrusts of this early resettlement was to create farm communities. Later the migrant issue became the focus.

DeMars: I know when we first came in that this major project, the Casa Grande, the thing in Arizona, was well underway as far as the land assembly. Have I talked about that yet?

Riess: No.

DeMars: Well, let's wait until we get into it.

Riess: What I'm trying to get straight here is how Cairns developed his thinking, and I think that we've more or less gotten that idea.

DeMars: I think I'd just go a step further. I think Cairns was more well-read than I, I mean to actually pursue various people's writings on these subjects. Maybe from talking with Walter. I don't know when he first met Walter Packard. Packard must have had a good deal of confidence in Burt. And he had a good strong personality and certain leadership qualities. I would say he had a certain charisma. I don't know why, what it was that threw us together, in a way.

He came into architecture never having done any drawing at all. This was not a thing which had ever happened to him before. Whereas that was my interest. I liked to draw and model and make things and so forth, so that was my route into architecture. Burt's, I think, might have been--you know, it might be a good idea to talk to Emmy Lou [Packard] sometime.³

Riess: But you're guessing maybe that Burt's was that he thought it was a way to solve problems, social problems?

²See Land and Power Development in California, Greece, and Latin America, 603 pp., an oral history with Walter E. Packard, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1970.

³See Emmy Lou Packard interview, 1979, in Graphic Arts Workshop Oral History Collection, Donated Tapes Collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

- DeMars: I'm not sure that it was that closely connected. I don't imagine that coming from high school, even though he might have been reasonably well read--. He may have gotten into architecture almost as accidentally as I did. But then he had to learn to draw, which he did very quickly, and was quite good at.
- Riess: You said, "And then one day they took us down to see The Plow that Broke the Plains in the U.A. Theater and I went out singing."⁴ I assume that this took place early in all of this.
- DeMars: Yes. That office was in downtown Berkeley, where that Great Western building is now. It had also been the building in which John Galen Howard started his first offices to do the University plan. He had a small staff there. It actually was being run as a school. They had no other place for it. Because when he won the competition in '98, or whatever it was, one of the things that the architect had to do was to agree to come to California, to adjust the plan, design certain of the buildings, and to start a school of architecture.

In "Readings on the Berkeley Campus," which Roger Montgomery put together for a course, at some point he gives the yearly budget and Howard's description of what it cost to run the thing, including the librarian and so forth, who was a part-time student. It was so ridiculously small, I couldn't believe it. [chuckles]

But anyway, there was quite a little bit of confusion. They had just set it [RRA] up here, and we had certain things to do, a couple of the little additional buildings for one of the camps. I don't know what I was working on. Well, designing these rails to tie the tent ropes to. But anyway, there was a certain excitement in the fact that there were maybe, I would say, half a dozen of us. That's about all that were there, six or eight, maybe. So some were doing this. Then you'd drop this and do something else. We were getting it going, you see, and I think Burt was kind of running it. [Joe] Weston came up, and there were certain buildings that were already somewhat underway, and we picked up and did the drafting to get them out. But it seemed like--well, I had no concept of the implications of where this was all going.

Riess: You hadn't gone out into the field so far?

DeMars: No, none of us--I don't think Burt had either, because it was just starting in there. And I don't know that Weston really had,

⁴Bay Area Houses, op. cit.

although he may have had something to do with the Arvin camp, Weedpatch.

Riess: When you say, "They took us down to see The Plow that Broke the Plains," who is the "they"?

DeMars: Oh, the "they" is the entire office. You see, we were just handling this thing. There were social workers, there were the field people. I don't know how many went over to see the movie. But it would have been a couple of dozen, two or three dozen there.

It was quite a large operation. When the camps got started, of course, there were the managers in each camp, usually a manager and maybe a couple of others on the payroll, often taken from among some of the migrants coming in. Because, you know, among the migrants there were all sorts of people who left those towns that went dead, in the Midwest, in Oklahoma. When the farmers had to pull up, so did a lot of others. Among them there were people that were even semi-professional, I'd say. At first we weren't aware of all that, other than the fact that-- well, there were enough people. Then as each camp got built there was a lot more back and forth.

Riess: Is this overstating it, "that you went out singing?"

DeMars: Oh, well, I guess what I would have been singing was [beginning to sing], "I'm riding Ole Paint, I'm leading Old Dan, I'm goin' to Montana to throw the hoolihan." That's an old cowboy song that becomes a kind of theme early in the film. The music was by the composer who wrote Four Saints in Three Acts for Gertrude Stein. [Virgil Thomson] His style was very sparse, like Copland's. That particular tune has been used in other works since. It's an important tune in Rodeo, the ballet, and it's also in Billy the Kid. It's kind of with a banjo background, and so forth. Somehow or other when it would come up Betty and I--I think she must have gone to see the movie with me--we would say, "There's our song."

Riess: The articles by John Steinbeck in the San Francisco News, October 5-12, 1936, had you read them?⁵

DeMars: I don't think so, no, not then. I probably didn't read the News. I probably saw the Chronicle. This must have been a series, I suppose somewhat sequential in a comparatively short period of

⁵Reproduced in The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to the Grapes of Wrath. Introduction by Charles Wollenberg, Heyday Books, Berkeley, 1988.

time, but I don't recall them being brought to our attention at the time.

Riess: I wondered whether they would have been circulated around the office.

DeMars: Could have been, and they probably didn't think that it was important for us to see it. [laughter]

That was another kind of interesting thing. There was an information division in the office, about three people or so. It expanded later on. Their mission was to show how bad everything was, you see. And Steinbeck was writing it as a reporter in this kind of thing, not blowing anything out of scale. I'm sure everything that he's written about in there, we saw it!

But I began to discover a little bit later that some of the people in this office really had quite a leftist bent. When we began to get a good number of sizable projects going and so forth, none of this achievement was ever mentioned. They were trying to show how bad things were, not that there was anything being done about them.

Riess: They never reported the progress?

DeMars: Not that I recall. I don't think I'm overstating this.

Riess: Did that have a kind of corrosive effect, or did you just ignore it?

DeMars: We just ignored it and went ahead. They were nice people, and I imagine it must have worried them. You know, "Man Bites Dog" is news, isn't it? The fact that all these conditions are now being taken care of, relax, well--.

Riess: Was their job to write up releases for the newspapers?

DeMars: Yes, I think they did.

Riess: It seems odd that three leftists, or whatever, got into that position, to interpret a government agency to the people.

DeMars: I should make a note on this, to see whether it's a misconception. I know that this seemed to have been the situation after we had a half a dozen of the things built, you see. In fact, the first wide publication we'd gotten was in 1941, in Architectural Forum and Progressive Architect. I think that was the first. And then others picked up from that.

Riess: You had Dorothea Lange and the FSA photographers.

DeMars: Well, they were photographing the people in the bad conditions, really, how they were living on ditchbanks and so on. Dorothea Lange did one set of photos for us. They couldn't get a photographer to do the Yuba City project when it was completed, and since she was on the payroll they sent her up to do it. And she did some very fine architectural photography. I think the contractor had to make a record set of photos at the end.

One of the photographs that I think I've shown you, but we'll get it out again, was an air view of Eleven Mile Corner, Arizona. And this photograph is so clear--it's looking down on it--you can see not only the camp part, the permanent homes, the farm section, the dairy, all the fences, you can see all the fence posts and you can see sage brush on one side, alfalfa on another side, and the wheel of the airplane. It's kind of amazing, because it's like a big model. You could tell that they've planted all the trees they're supposed to, because down there you had to have a little berm around, to hold the water. And that shows up in the photograph. The tree doesn't show up yet.

Riess: This was exciting, wasn't it, for an architect to have a sort of tabula rasa.

DeMars: Well, and I was thinking of that, too, in the context of Telesis and so forth. When I see what you have to go through today to do a development in the city, buying the land, tearing down the houses and going to hearings and convincing people that this ought to be done and raising the funds and all the other things, you wonder that anything ever gets done, in a way, if there weren't sufficient greed behind to push it along.

But this work, we got to thinking of it almost like an assembly line. Here it was coming through--this was after about a year or so--and this time there was going to be a new camp here, some new housing in a place that had already been built. Now that the camp was going they were going to need housing there, and so forth. This was kind of almost on a schedule, and as it moved through here you got at it as you could, and you tried to finish it up, and it went out. Then we went, "Okay, we can't do a new community building here because we haven't got it finished yet. So we'll do it in the next one. Okay, let's do it here. Let's change the last community building, because it obviously isn't working anymore." We had experience of what had been built the year before. And we went and visited; we were making field trips to supervise the construction of these things.

Riess: As a way of dealing with this most tangibly, let's take a particular community and go through your role and go through the time frame.

DeMars: The head of the office was an engineer. It's a wonder that he allowed us as much freedom as we had. But apparently our first work was satisfactory. Sometimes we had to do quite a bit of arguing to make a change. But we were so reasonable. We knew that the budgets for these things were very low, and if we said, "Look, we can't do it for this," then, "Well, we'll find a little more," or something like that. But it was definitely low-cost, low-budget stuff. We found that a kind of a challenge in itself, which interested us.

I don't know how permanent we thought of these. After a while we thought of it as more permanent.

Riess: How would the assignment be presented? Would the community already be people squatting on the land?

DeMars: Not where the thing was, necessarily. There would be the need in an area. Tulare was one. Or to put it another way, they soon found--. I'm trying to backtrack here. I would say that these things got done in about six months from beginning to end, maybe even less sometimes. Some of them were a little more elaborate, took a little bit longer. But when our office got through with them they went out to general bidding immediately, with deadlines on construction and so forth. And then, since it was reasonably simple stuff, it got done in a reasonable length of time.

Maybe I've already referred to the fact that all the other regions in the country that were doing houses, in Appalachia, or maybe replacing a house for a farmer, maybe in Utah or something, or barns or other kinds of things of this sort, these were all sent to Washington to be approved, and then they would check the plans to see if the dimensions were correct, and so forth. You can imagine how long this process took.

Riess: Hideous, yes.

DeMars: In our particular case, our head engineer, Herb Halsteen, came from Washington, I think, or at least he started from the central office there and then was sent out to run this program as the district engineer, it was called. I'd overhear him on the phone: "Look, do you guys want this this year? Okay, then get off our backs. When something's under construction we'll send you some blueprints."

He could talk to them that way. His argument was, "Look, you guys in Washington don't know anything about this whole migrant problem. We know more about it than you do and we're learning as we go along." In fact, I don't know if he even went that far. He said, "We know all about it."

##

Riess: How was the location of the communities decided? First they would get into an area where there was a lot of farming going on.

DeMars: Oh, they'd hear the rumor that they were needing harvesters in this particular area, and they'd come in, they'd swarm in there in their cars to try to get a job, you see.

Riess: And so who would tell them where they could park their cars in the first place?

DeMars: Well, just like the homeless in San Francisco right now. They parked along ditch banks and things.

Riess: Because ditch banks had water?

DeMars: Yes. But they were, you might say, squatters.

Riess: And so the communities that you built, did they actually follow the squatters, or did you relocate them?

DeMars: I imagine that in the front office they were saying, "Well, from last year's harvest and this harvest, where's the concentration been? What's the news coming in from all parts of the country, all parts of the state?" and so forth. Then they would try to find a place that would be most central, and land that was available, because the acreage was quite large for one of these.

Riess: And whose land was it?

DeMars: Well, they bought it. It would be farmland that would be bought for this purpose.

They would decide that they'd do a camp at "X." They were usually well out from the town. I don't recall very many of them being right close to the existing town. In fact, the air view we've got of Yuba City--you can see Yuba City and Marysville off in the distance, two miles away. But maybe that was to get the land cheap enough to buy the farmland there to go ahead. Now we were involved to this extent, that Burt may have been the one who went out and helped pick this piece of land, because it had a nice orchard, and we were going to use the orchard for shade trees.

Riess: Yes, I wondered about that.

DeMars: You'd just take enough trees out to get the tents in between them or whatever.

Then another little group goes out to purchase the land, to make the options, do all of this kind of thing, make the initial arrangements for whatever land clearing and so forth is needed, you see. And so help me, in one case they went out and cleared all the orchard out, said, "Here's your site."

Riess: Where were your landscape architects?

DeMars: Well, they hadn't been consulted at that point. Or, they may have gone out. Burt may have gone with Corwin, or whoever, and picked this site over a couple of others and assumed that saving the trees would be taken for granted.

I think after that they paid a little more attention. In other words, the bosses--I think that our performance initially probably helped. I suppose it helped that one of our guys, Burt Cairns, was a son-in-law of Walter Packard. [chuckles] But again, I don't think there was ever any nepotism going on, because he was vitally interested and Packard had great confidence in him. He met the other people who were the head of the regional office here, and so forth, and they must have been [aware of the connection].

Riess: But he [Burt Cairns] did have a remarkable amount of power to make decisions, you're saying, given the fact that it was a federal operation.

DeMars: Yes. Well, not so much Cairns as his immediate supervisor, called the District Engineer, who was in charge of the construction division, whatever needed to be built. You see, this being the central administrative office for over six western states, there was quite a sizeable staff to handle the several other aspects of the FSA program such as financial, crop advising, and nutritional and health programs for the family-sized farms in some of the states. This was all in addition to the migrant problem.

When buildings were needed, the construction division came in. We did barns, and whatever was needed to raise chickens, turkeys, dairy cattle, etc., etc. All the large projects had adjacent farmland with operative dairies supplying milk to the camps as well as adjacent communities.

Then the health program grew to the point of bringing in local doctors to the camp's clinic, often on a volunteer basis, and I believe these programs were the start of the Blue Cross, etc. Of course, local hospitals handled serious cases, but at Eleven Mile Corner, beyond Casa Grande Farms, it was found more desirable and economical to add a sixty bed hospital to the project clinic in order to handle the case loads of several of the Arizona projects.

I'm trying to think if there was anybody before Halsteen. I think not. And then there was an assistant. It ended up that Nick Cirino was the one who had the role after Halsteen left.

The Camps and the Clients

Riess: Had you read Catherine Bauer's Modern Housing at this point? It was written in 1934.

DeMars: I think I must have, almost simultaneously with this, if it came out in '34. It was certainly one of the early things that I did read on the subject, and began to see that we were involved in something that wasn't being invented just for this local problem.

I think what we got from that [Bauer] was that there probably had to be governmental intervention to provide housing for people who otherwise were in no position to produce it or to get it done or to afford it. And it probably implied subsidy, which we could see in Germany and other places where housing had been destroyed and then was rebuilt by the government. And it was a problem. And then also to depend on the market--well, the market wasn't producing housing for low-income people at all. And that other countries had also found the same thing.

This was sort of the gist of this, that it was a legitimate governmental activity, and that without it it wouldn't be getting produced. And isn't that one of the things which in a modern industrial society people ought to have, decent housing? Of course, remember Roosevelt, "one-third of the people are ill-clothed, ill-housed, and ill-fed."

Also I think what we were drawing from it was that these other countries, which were not necessarily themselves socialist countries or whatever, were already doing it, and that they were ahead of us by ten years or more. That was the point of Telesis as well. Most of us had been to Europe, we saw them having at

least addressed all these problems, and we thought there were a number of solutions, at least part of which were applicable here. And at least in the physical thing that we could see, it was a damn sight better than tenements. In fact, I don't know--well, what would have been built around, in this area, for just mass housing?

Riess: I don't have any idea.

In Yuba City, would it have been possible to put the migrant housing right along the edge of the town? What prohibited you from expanding the town?

DeMars: Probably the town wouldn't have allowed it in the first place, that might have been one of the things.

Riess: Were these pariahs, all these people who were coming in?

DeMars: Yes, that's partly it. And then, partly, what we were building for the most part were tent platforms and single cabins, and a state park kind of thing that needs some space around it, or insulation from an urban center which might want to grow out to it, and replace it. So the question is, how close to the town could you get them? It may very well have been that they tried to get it as close as they could, considering land values and so on.

Riess: In the beginning were they concerned with schools and churches and community centers? Did they expect that the town would support that aspect?

DeMars: I don't know where they thought the kids were going to get schools, but we started building schools in the projects, you see, soon afterwards.

Riess: Who decided that you really had to have schools and community centers, and that there were consequences in building things in hexagonal forms rather than in straight line forms? Who articulated all of this? How did it evolve?

DeMars: My recollection was that we would get feedback from the managers of the camps that they needed this and that. And we would get it personally sometimes, when we'd go down on the inspection trips, which we did quite a number of times during the process. Because, well, we were carrying out the role of the architect, and we were doing the supervision. Supervision in the sense of seeing that the contractor is doing what he's supposed to do, according to the plans. Or answer questions sometimes.

Riess: That's unusual?

DeMars: That's the way architects are supposed to work on any job. The word "supervision" doesn't mean superintendence. The superintendent is the builder, the guy that's really running the actual operation. He's the one that is working for the owner or whoever. He's the one who's building the thing according to your plans. Now, you have to constantly see that he understands the plans. And there's a contract. We had a legal division drawing up--well, I guess we did specifications in our office. But the typical thing is you have a contract in which he is legally bound to produce this, and he says he will, he signs the thing. And he will follow the plans and specifications.

Well, sometimes they get into problems, and sometimes the architect, you haven't figured something out quite right. If you have some kind of a liaison that is at least friendly--you mustn't be too friendly--you find that, well, we didn't think of how that piping couldn't get through this wall. What can we do? What would you suggest? They'll say, well, we could do this or this. Those are ironing out small points. Sometimes there would be things that we really had kind of overlooked, and there were some things that we were requiring that really were not that critical. This other thing was more important, really, by far.

We'd make a little tradeoff. I would say, "Look, let's forget that fence around there. But let's fix those water heaters, and this thing, which we didn't cover quite adequately." You're not supposed to do that, of course. You've got to be very careful about it, because it can rebound. But we would do it. We only did it where we thought it was worth the tradeoff in a particular case. Then we'd go back and straighten out the plans so that the next time it was done it wouldn't happen.

Riess: This is the virtue of not sending plans through Washington?

DeMars: Oh yes, partially. Although I don't think that was a reason--it was purely the expedient desire to actually get the stuff done in a hurry.

When we got through, after about five years, I think we'd done about forty of these projects throughout the West. Some of them, they just took the plans and made some adjustments. For instance, we did several in Texas. And Garrett [Eckbo] had done the site plans. I don't think he ever went down there. It was a piece of flat land. So he could do it like a billiard table, you know. And then they built them. We didn't inspect those. I have no idea what they look like.

Riess: It got that smooth after five years.

DeMars: I guess. And maybe it wasn't that terribly critical. A piece of philosophy I was able to develop a little bit later is that in general housing you don't need Washington to review whether a drugstore should go on this corner. These people were building towns and buildings, doing it themselves. Supposing they don't do it as well as we'd like to have them do it, aesthetically more pleasant or something, but good lord, leave them alone and they'll probably do reasonable standards. And if they don't, well, that's their hard luck. I mean, it's too bad, they had the opportunity to do this well. So I think we learned this by maturing a little bit in the process.

Riess: And maybe burning out after a while?

DeMars: No, I don't think it was that. It was just simply, can you really from any central point, even as central as California is to Washington, Oregon, and so forth, dictate the minutia of how they're doing their thing, and so forth? In general they followed our plans very carefully.

Riess: It sounds like they could write to you, as one would write to Sear's, and order a plan for a community.

DeMars: This was almost it. I think in the front office this was happening. "We want to do a camp like so-and-so, send us the plans." So it was kind of assembled and sent down to them.

Looking at a Portfolio: Hexagonal Plans

Riess: Tell me where the best thinking came together. Was it Woodville?

DeMars: Well yes, Woodville. That was the first time that we said, "Look, we're really building a new community here. Let's go back and think the whole thing through again."

One of the things about the hexagon plan was that the teenagers--everybody had a car, obviously, that's what you had to have for work, but there was a lot of sort of drag racing going on around the things.

People had to cross these pieces of street, and I don't recall any accidents, but we had complaints from some of the managers. Here's where Radburn comes in as a scheme, where all the houses are on cul-de-sacs, you see, and they're not on main roads. Main roads are to pick up traffic from the cul-de-sacs.

We decided to adopt that notion, that there would be a main road and there would be cul-de-sacs off of this which would be parking bays, particularly for the camp, because it was quite dense with people. Then off the parking bays there would be walks, and the little cabins would go around these walks where people were living, and that opened out into the play field behind. So it was a sort of cul-de-sac on a cul-de-sac on a cul-de-sac.

[Tape interruption]

Riess: Now we're sitting and looking at a portfolio.

DeMars: There were two of these portfolios. After I left, years later they must have gone on with the same thing, because it ended up with about sixty pages. A lot of the projects I hadn't seen. I just found this a year or so ago, and then it got mislaid again, and I found it again. There are also a set of 5x7 photographs of the whole thing. That's what I was just looking for now as a quick way to go through it. Those have all of this, plus the additional work that had been done after Garrett and I left at the beginning of the war.

Riess: "Rural Housing: Work of the District Engineer's Office, District 6, Farm Security Administration, 1936-39." It includes migratory labor camps, permanent housing, and cooperative farms. Casa Grande is one of the ones you refer to, and Chandler, just above Casa Grande.

DeMars: Yes, and here's Eleven-Mile Corner.

Riess: These are all in Arizona.

DeMars: Those are all Arizona. Now the first ones we did were Glendale and Baxter, later called Camel Back Farms. That was in the works when we started working in Berkeley. Those were to be built in adobe.

The point was, during the PWA period when they were putting--let's see, PWA? No, WPA.

Riess: PWA came first [1933].

DeMars: Public Works Administration. I don't know whether this would be called Public Works. The other meant Works Progress [WPA, 1935], didn't it?

Riess: Right.

DeMars: The idea there was if they used adobe, they were in a piece of the country where the workers knew how to do it. This would put people to work and at not much cost for materials. So that was used. Most of the permanent housing we did in Arizona was done in that way until we got down to Eleven-Mile Corner, which was a mix of all three types. I'll show you that. That's the one that had the air view. [shows a picture] Here was the final version of this hexagonal camp, which has a whole story to it in addition.

This is the clinic building. It became the Burton Cairns Memorial Hospital, by adding wings to it, a sixty-bed hospital. And later on in the program, each of the camps had a clinic. And this would be the isolation unit for families coming in; if there was someone who was sick they had to camp in here. And this was the manager's house, just a little bit isolated here.

Riess: All of these units are basically on the outskirts of two rows of hexagons with a perimeter road and an inside road and five roads through it. You're saying that this is where the joy-riders zoomed around?

DeMars: Yes, to a certain extent.

Riess: You can certainly see the temptation.

DeMars: It would be a great temptation.

Now, the evolution of that layout I might just go into for a moment. This was the first one done. This was for a short season camp, and for the short season they were trying to do it with as low a cost as possible per unit. It might only be going for six weeks, let us say. So what are you going to do? I think about the same time they did this, they started building mobile camps. They had tent platforms that unfolded, and they'd provide the tents. They had a shower trailer. Then there was a heating plant on a trailer that heated the hot water and so forth. They had electrical standards around through the camp. Trailers for the manager, for the doctor for the clinic, and a little tent next to it and so forth.

I don't know if I've actually got pictures of that in here. Yes. Here's the clinic, I think. Here's the entrance to the shower. When set up it was like this, an enclosure for men and one for women. Here was the community tent. Here's the boiler for hot water for the showers and laundry. See, here's the interior of the shower.

It was actually the engineers, who were just at the other end of the room where we were working, and with whom we were consulting all the time, who did this whole thing. I don't think we were involved in it at all. We were very busy doing our stuff, you see. And there were about fifteen of these short season camps used in California.

The hexagonal plan is because we didn't really need a sewage disposal plant for such a short period, and they had to use privies. There's a water tower; that's the water source.

Riess: In the very center, yes.

DeMars: And next to the water source is the building that has showers and laundry, so there would be hot water. So that's the only hot water situation in the place. This is the manager's house, the little simple one here. But of course it had a bathroom, water heater, etc. And this is the little utility shed and gatehouse where you check in and so forth. This is the community building, which is just a little enclosed building with a kitchen and toilets and a paved area outside for meetings and square dances. [chuckles]

Riess: And the privies?

DeMars: The privies had to be seventy-five feet away from the water source, and also seventy-five feet from the dwellings.

Riess: I see.

DeMars: So first you do the watertower, laundry, and showers, and you have a circle of privies around it, seventy-five feet away. Then comes a circle of cabins seventy-five feet farther out. Next, the road, and then the tent platforms across that road, and finally another circle of privies, seventy-five feet away around the whole thing. [pointing to map]

These are the tent platforms, but these are little permanent cabins, you see, around the middle. So during the height of the season it gets loaded with people coming in with their own tent and putting it up. They at least get a clean floor. Then as the season coasts on, most of these people presumably have left. Some of these people could hang on, and later we built little houses, each of them on a quarter of an acre. Later on this little subdivision of some twenty houses was doubled and built down this side, and we added some school buildings in here. This was the school that was already there. So that would be the typical thing.

Well, the engineer said it's difficult to lay out a circle. You don't take a big string and do it. You have to do it by offsets. It makes it more expensive to do. "If you could accept a hexagon, we could round the corners." They can do that easily. So we went ahead with this, and this was the first of the hexagons, the project at Wesley, California, but it was the last of the permanent camps using privies.

Still the pressure of need didn't allow us time to re-think the site plan, and the engineers wanted to adapt the hex plan to the full season problem, simply by adding flush toilet buildings instead of privies, and still centralizing water heating by keeping laundry and showers in the middle. Of course the mobile camps used privies, portable ones.

##

DeMars: In the permanent camp we still have the--let's see, is this the playfield in here? This would all be a central area. This is the laundry yard. Can you see the posts?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: This would be laundry and showers, men's, women's.

Riess: We shouldn't spend too much time going over the details, because it's not going to read well at all in the transcript.

DeMars: All right. But just very quickly--there are toilet buildings now in the middle of the sections of the hexagon.

Riess: Each of the five sections.

DeMars: The community building occupies the sixth. This is a permanent community building with a child-care adaptability and a kitchen, rest rooms, etc. This is some of the permanent housing. Here is the Arizona version of a silo, which is a pit in the ground, and hay barn, dairy, turkey farm. These are the cows and calves.

Here's the sewage disposal plant, and here are the leaching fields of the plant. This has already been made ready to plant alfalfa. This one hasn't. Here's the sagebrush. Here's the alfalfa after it starts to grow. You can see the kind of size of the piece of land that they needed. And some of the people, maybe two or three of the permanent residents, would be hired to run the farm. And if this would be planted in anything other than alfalfa during the season, they would also hire people from the project to work on that as they needed them. And these were the ones who

were able to get enough work in the general area to be able to be there year-round.

Riess: Am I seeing this before it's finished? Are there ever any trees?

DeMars: Oh, there were trees. Those are actually tree spots there.

Riess: They are far from random! The landscape architect couldn't conceive of a few randomly-placed trees at this point?

DeMars: Well, I think later on you'll find that they did. I think that these were planted with the thought that you could drive your car between them after they came up. There are the fences drawn there. But you'll see, some of the other plans are much more capable of various kinds of random things.

Riess: In your article in Task 2 you said that Casa Grande Co-op was a good achievement because "...at first sixty families were to have been on separate acreage, with separate facilities, but instead were joined together to operate four thousand acres as a community."⁶ You also discussed Weedpatch and Woodville.

DeMars: I should straighten that out. We are talking about three different things. Weedpatch was purely a camp for migrant workers, for the Joads. Steinbeck called it "Wheatpatch" in the Grapes of Wrath, and the F.S.A. called it "Arvin" for the town nearby. This was the first job we worked on. "Woodville" was the last one, nearly forty projects later! We learned a lot between those two. "Farm labor homes" were added to Weedpatch later and planned in from the beginning at Woodville, but these were both rental housing communities for "farm labor," not for full time family farmers with equity in the operation. Casa Grande was the latter--at least a large scale experiment to compete with the existing pattern of industrial farming.

This is what Weedpatch looked like. (This happens to be Shafter, but Weedpatch was the identical plan.) These buildings were already built when we got into the act.

Riess: "These" being?

DeMars: "These" would be the toilets and showers for a certain number of families with the laundry at the end, outdoors, you see. But here were the tent platforms with the railings. Can you see?

Riess: I can see the ramada.

⁶Task Magazine, Issue No. 2, 1941, pp. 5-9.

DeMars: Here's the ramada, and there's the little kind of piano box that separates each family. Here you park the car. And you can see the trees already. Now these--I was down there about two months ago, in Shafter. This is the one I stopped at. These buildings are still there. I think they're just using the laundry part, using the rest as storage buildings or something. The trees have all gotten to be quite magnificent now. You know, how long ago was that? Over fifty years. But I think what they've done is where maybe four platforms were would be one house now, two- and three-bedroom houses throughout the area. So there's a house there, there, there, and there.

Riess: And who owns it now?

DeMars: Well, I think a local housing authority probably owns it, and it's being rented. They were all Mexicans. This is now a child-care center that any community would envy. These trees are magnificent now. It's very nice. This was all fenced and very nice. I made some kodachromes of the interior of this. But these others were some of the first houses that we did when we started doing some permanent housing.

Riess: They're delightful, with the awnings.

DeMars: Yes. That came from a thing we discovered in Arizona, that in order to make life possible in Phoenix there's a screened porch on every house, no matter what its architectural style, which might have been anything from New England colonial to Shakespearian half-timber. They would either have a roof deck that you could go out and sleep on, or in addition there would be a screened porch on the back with these flap things worked by hardware you could buy in the local hardware stores. They were just a kind of a strap that ran through a slot in a two-by-four that the screen was nailed to. You see, it didn't take any elaborate frames for windows.

We adapted that when we did Chandler by using this as the main windows for the sleeping parts, which were put on a second story to follow the custom that we had discovered in Phoenix. Another phenomena of the area is that your lawn is irrigated by flooding; you have a berm around it and you flood that. So you have a layer of moist air, almost, over the whole landscape that goes up six or seven feet. And if you're sleeping at that level it's not nearly as cool at night as it is if you can get about one story up. Chandler had only the bedrooms up above, and they were quite open from one side to the other. You could get the breeze going right through.

Oh, we were very conscious. They didn't just discover environmental orientation and so forth at the present time. We would go down there and it would be 120 degrees in the shade, you know, things like that. We were reacting to what we saw as the specific problem. Southern Arizona is a real frying pan with heat, although dry.

Riess: Was there a native architecture in southern Arizona?

DeMars: I'd say that there wasn't, really.

Riess: Of course, maybe people never lived there until they got greedy enough to try to irrigate and farm it.

DeMars: Well again, that's probably true.

[Tape interruption]

Riess: You are talking about Casa Grande?

DeMars: We just talked it over. For instance, here, just to show some of the things--these windows go clear to the floor.

Riess: That looks like a [William] Wurster-looking detail.

DeMars: Well, it could be. But the point was, in the first place in an adobe you don't have long horizontal windows. There's a concrete foundation beam that goes clear around. At this layer the window and door heads, when the adobes get this high, we pour a bond beam completely around the building that sort of laces the whole thing together, which in an earthquake would hold up. So you don't want big spans there. But we wanted the window openings to go to the floor, and we used casement windows to get full ventilation when you open them. And then all of it's only one room deep. This shows you what it looked like along their main road, and of course, these are the trees that were planted.

Riess: When I say that that looks influenced by Wurster, is that possible? Did you have in your head some of that?

DeMars: I think it is purely coincidental. Wurster would have done that sort of thing, it might have been a double-hung window, which he used a good deal. We didn't use them because you only got half the ventilation with a double-hung window.

[looking at portfolio] I'm going to try to track down where the originals of these photos are. That's the set I wanted to show you. We'll do that maybe on another occasion.

This is at Weedpatch.

Riess: "The Minimal House," it's called.

DeMars: This is when they first said, these people aren't going away in the wintertime. We thought they'd just go home. But of course, they don't have any homes. Some of them were told that if they could somehow manage to find a place to live through the winter and get some odd jobs, they'd be the first ones to get hired by this particular farmer next spring. If you could put twenty-five or thirty little houses around--.

So we studied what they'd been building for themselves as the minimal house, on a ditch bank. They would build a single room out of tin or scrap lumber. And of course they didn't have a screen porch, but we thought this single room for the bad weather and a place to sleep for the rest of the time would be the minimal house. But it does have plumbing; it has a toilet, it has a shower. We figured they could wash their hands in the kitchen sink, and of course it had a stove and so forth, even a refrigerator.

Riess: Then you learned that the houses were too small, and the plots too large.

DeMars: Yes. This was on a half-acre. People got to thinking that they could have a cow and really have a little farm on a half-acre. And of course, one cow is too much. You couldn't sell the milk unless you had a dairy situation that was authorized and so forth. And also the cost of roads, sewers--.

This development was right next to the camp itself, where they had hot water for showers, laundry, they had flush toilets, and they had electricity. From that they weren't going to graduate to privies and a pump in the back yard! This was what made it kind of silly to build such a tiny house with all these other costs, when just a little bit more in the house would justify the utilities. This is actually a sketch of mine.

In this picture these people in the camps now have toilets and showers. They don't have electricity in their tents, but they have it in all their buildings. And it would be some of these people who can manage to get a job through the winter and get enough income to pay their \$8.50 a month rent to the manager of the adjacent camp for their house and lot. This was the first attempt at the design. After this is when we began doing these other little houses.

Oh, now this is a good view to show what the house grew into a little later, and the quarter-acre plot. This shows some of the plans.

Riess: Are these all your drawings in here?

DeMars: I guess these sketches are, the top set. I don't draw those kind of trees. These are mine. But you can see the house is similar to this because it has--there's the living-dining room.

Riess: It's a square, with two bedrooms.

DeMars: There are two bedrooms. All the plumbing is in one wall here, including the laundry tray at the end, on a little back porch. That was all pre-fabricated in one place on the site, as were the house walls, partitions and roof trusses. This was the Arizona design with a metal roof and a ventilator in the top and these louvered flaps so you can get a bigger shaded opening for ventilation. This one is for California. Up in the Northwest the laundry had to be enclosed.

Here are some other pictures. Here is the little kitchen, before they put the refrigerator in. Here was a project in Idaho where we tried flat roofs. I don't know why we did it now, probably it was cheaper and made it more "modern." We found it made it look like a garage. It wasn't much bigger than that. This is what the community building had grown into by this time.

Chandler, and Yuba City

Riess: You were thinking about flat roofs and Corbusier and International Style. This was in your mind, wasn't it?

DeMars: It was in my mind after my trip to Europe in '38. I came back from that and Fran Violich had already laid out part of Yuba City.

When I got back I was full of Corbusier, and also we were asked to "do a Chandler" in California, because they found it was very satisfactory. Chandler was actually made of adobe, but in other words, could we house them in row houses as a cheaper way to do it than separate little houses? It would take up less land and so on. So these were, I think, eight units.

The town is now--I saw this fifteen or twenty years ago--the town of Marysville has gone completely around this. This is an awful rural slum right now, filled with trailers, shacks, all

kinds of things, auto bodies, etc. More trees have grown up. I drove into it. I was so sort of distressed, I didn't stay long.

Riess: To live eight families to a building, in a way it is like the cabins are townhouses and these are apartments. And it's always been a little nicer to be in a townhouse.

DeMars: Yes, but these are townhouses. They are two stories separated by party walls.

Now here is my "Corbusier" sketch of what these buildings consist of.

Riess: Let me just read into the machine a little bit of what you've written here. This is in what you call the "multiple-family dwellings." They house six families with a living room and kitchen on the first floor, two bedrooms and bath above. Each end unit in addition has a dormitory which may be divided with curtains to serve as two sleeping rooms.

DeMars: Now, see at the end, all it is is that piece that overhangs adds this amount of space to one of the regular units. You see it here in this plan? This has the two bedrooms with the little door through what would be in the side wall.

Riess: There was a need for what you were doing and you could meet this need, and you and all the people who were working on it were motivated to try to improve people's lives and bring dignity to their lives. Was it exciting?

DeMars: I had read Catherine Bauer's book and I remember her saying, "It would not be going too far to say that there is no modern housing in the United States." This was after she was reviewing what they had done in Europe, you see, addressing the problem. That's what she meant by modern housing, mass housing in a decent way for large groups of people. Now at first we didn't realize that we were doing that.

Riess: You were solving a problem.

DeMars: Just solving this most basic, immediate problem. And then, as the thing progressed, and it seemed to have been working, if they just had this and this and this, you see, added to this situation--well, we were building little communities. And at one point I remember saying, "If Catherine Bauer only knew what we were doing." Because nobody seemed to know. This was before we had any publication of the work.

Riess: And your propagandists weren't doing you any good propaganda.

DeMars: No, not any.

Riess: The first publication, you say, came in 1940?

DeMars: This book in 1940 done in Zurich included the Chandler project, because I had the pictures with me when I went to Zurich in 1938. We'll talk more about that later. This piece is called "Farm Security Administration." [Architctural Forum, January 1941] And they show some work done. Here is some in the Appalachians, you see. It shows the plan afterwards. It's a nice little house, but it has no facilities. The toilet is a privy, and water was from a pump in the yard. And here was the house they had before, you see. So this was what was going on in the East. But here they're showing the Yuba City. And the magazines were most interested in this, of course. You can see.

The second piece was in Pencil Points in November of '41, by Talbot Hamlin. Here was one of the mobile camps. But almost all the rest of the illustrations are of our work. These were the little cabins. They were Tennessee Coal and Iron. We even had things like this, you see. At first we just had a water faucet. Well, it made a mud puddle around it. And the garbage cans, and where do you throw the dishwater? Well, they threw it in the ground, and that got sour and so forth.

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DeMars: Here was one of the little bits of--not bureaucratic, but what shall I say, territorial or industrial complex connection with Washington, called the Iron Triangle, on a very small scale. These were little cabin things we did for places where they needed a little more than a tent in the camp itself. This is up in the Northwest. The Tennessee Coal and Iron Company got Washington to say, "We can do that in metal at half the cost." Now you can imagine what this is like in the Central Valley.

Riess: In Tulare, a metal building. It's cruel.

DeMars: Yes. And at nighttime it doesn't give you much insulation or anything. But when the weather was pouring rain and so forth, it was better than a tent. And you weren't in it much during the daytime because it was too damned hot. We hated these things, it gave an awful look.

This is one of the photos that Dorothea Lange took of Yuba City. In close-up detail here it is, and here again we were using sheet material on the outside, asbestos boarding.

Riess: That was new, to use asbestos?

DeMars: Well, it was the kind of thing that Corbu would have proposed, you see, large sheet materials like this. It makes it a kind of more industrial thing.

This in Yuba City was really an interpretation of Chandler, which was one of the first things that we did. I would say this is almost exclusively my design, because I was working on it in Washington, D.C. when a group of us were called back there, working with Walter Packard. Now did I go into this before with you at all?

Riess: No.

DeMars: I think this is interesting and rather critical in the mix. Joe Weston was still the head architect, but we had been sent back. I don't think Cairns stayed. He went back with us, but I was kept there, because they had a large staff doing other projects out of Washington in a converted hotel. Packard's office was up on the top floor. Weston and his head designer, Christopher Choate, had done these rather nicely-designed little houses in El Monte in southern California as part of the kind of subsistence homestead thing. They were going to bring architecture and good taste to the peasants, in a sense.

So in Arizona they had proposed around this town of Chandler that there would be a cooperative farm. They had quite a large piece of land some six hundred acres, and it would be run cooperatively. But they would also house people working the farm, which would just be a handful, thirty-two families who would then be able to be farmworkers in that area, but in a more permanent way than a camp, certainly. This was really before there were any camps in Arizona at all. It was thought of as a more permanent solution, you see.

Choate was filled with ideas of a sort of Mexican hacienda kind of thing. He wanted to put all the artists to work, as they did at the beginning of that period. There would be sort of scalloped walls and there would be sculpted figures of agriculture and the farmworker and so forth on this. The entrance would be into a great courtyard with the houses forming a continuous outer wall of this great court, the scalloped walls around the outside edge, a garden on the inside. And the entrance to the whole thing was a great rococo archway with spiral columns and sculptured figures like the church at San Xavier del Bac, you know, outside of Tucson, that white church from the 1700s.

Well, I was called back to Washington, partly I think, because--. I knew Walter well enough at the time. And he called me in one day and said, "You know, you've seen these proposals of Choate's and Weston's. If Congress ever sees this, we're going to be shot down like a balloon out of the sky." In the scheme, because so much money was going to go into all this extraneous stuff, they couldn't afford toilets in these various houses. They'd have central toilets and central showers to make it more collective.

Riess: Seems strange that it would run amuck like this.

DeMars: Well, it had gotten this far because Weston was a terribly nice guy, and this guy Chris Choate was very talented. You know, his renderings are beautiful, the watercolors and that sort of thing. And it's filled with this. If that had been given him as a problem, he was doing it beautifully. But to consider that they were just using this as a kind of vehicle to put the artists and sculptors to work--and I think there was probably a large mural in a Diego Rivera manner inside someplace, too.

The whole reason for trying to group the houses was to save more money on the costs. So Packard said, "Can't we do something to group these things without subjecting it to what's going to happen if this gets out of hand? Why not some simple little row houses, like those nearby in Georgetown?"--only Chandler would be adobe instead of brick.

The idea appealed to me. Here's the plan, you see. The adobe wall divides each one. If you ask about a regional influence, I really took the profile of the party walls from the buttresses you see up in northern New Mexico on the old mission churches. It is adobe, after all. The two-story adobe wall that separates each household is great for both heat and sound insulation. Then the party wall extends some six feet beyond the rear wall of the house to give both shade and privacy from such nearby neighbors.

Here you can see the floor above, with just the heavier beam exposed and diagonal sheathing there. And we used this cheap hardware throughout the whole thing and gave it a kind of a farmhouse look.

Riess: I must keep harking back to Wurster when I look at that. That looks like Gregory farmhouse detailing.

DeMars: Well, I would say we were not unaware of that. And maybe the fact that it had been done and it fitted this situation. And it was not more expensive to do it this way, it was cheaper.

But we went even a step further. We began to find that throughout that area people were making their own desert coolers. They would typically take one window of the house and blank the window off. Then you made a box and a frame with chicken wire on both sides, filled with excelsior. And then a little piece of pipe at the top with holes in it, a hose attached to that, and it dripped down. There was a trough at the bottom that ran it off, and then a fan that pulled the air in. Later on these were commercially made. Still, it's called a desert cooler, and you see them even today in the valley when you can't afford real air conditioning. Here it is in the plan. It's built right into the corner of the wall. There is a fan in the kitchen. It pulls the air in through that, and then the little trough on the outside runs off into the garden where the water is. It doesn't use that much water.

The thought was, the whole lower floor was sort of like an early American kitchen living space. I learned later there's even a name for it: the "keeping room." There would be a settee over here. Somebody would sleep on that at night. The table is in the middle. And one of the things that Chandler--I've got kodachromes of this--in the East they were supporting some factories in the Appalachians that made well-designed simplified furniture. They had the whole line, beds, chests of drawers and everything, almost Scandinavian in their design. So this whole thing was furnished with that when the people came to it, which was really lovely.

Here is the first time, architecturally, that these flap things had been integrated, you see, as an architectural motive. And I think it gave a good deal of interest. The orientation of this large window--we discovered by facing this way it did two things. There were some prevailing breezes that came from the southwest. Also, the worst sun of the day down there in the summer was from the northwest, 5:00-7:00 p.m., when the sun is just coming down, almost ready to set, and north windows got a burning kind of light coming in. We just turned it around so the blank end of the building faces into that worst part. In the wintertime, of course, you get beneficial sun coming in on the south side. So the north side, or northwest, is comparatively a solid wall, but with quite a big opening on the bedroom level, whereas the other side is almost completely open--it goes from wall to wall, these flaps.

Now the lower flap was plywood, because in the wintertime--this might have been a winter shot. Here's someone who used the lower one for ventilation. This had a kind of a glass substitute, stuff they call celloglass, wire screening dipped in plastic. That gives you light. And again, notice the shadow here. It

really cut the sun off completely, as far as the light that gets in.

Riess: Were you aware at the time that you were doing this of how brilliant it was? [laughs]

DeMars: Well, I thought it was rather good at the time. [chuckles] This is not unrelated also to Catherine's book, Modern Housing. This was one of the very first things I did, you see, 1937. Because as I said I had these pictures with me in '38 when I went to Zurich. It had already been built. Then when I got back later in '38 we got right on to Yuba City. They had decided they liked this notion. They did feel it saved land. So we were directed to do a Chandler kind of thing, but in California materials in our next project in California. That was when I got back from the trip to Europe, filled with some Corbusier ideas and so forth.

Also, in one of Corbusier's books he has a proposal for the ideal farm. It has a little house up on stilts with some pipe columns and the garage underneath here. In Corbusier's sketch there's a big sliding door that opens the kitchen to the living room. In our case in Yuba City we got the sliding door. Because in the plan we were trying to do the same thing we'd got in Chandler where we had a pair of doors that opened, dividing off one bedroom from the other, so that on the hottest nights the parents would be in the front room and the kids in the other one. You had privacy when you needed it, but on the hot nights you'd open these two doors and you could get through ventilation. Well, in this case we have quite a wide opening there. There's a door to get into the room and a sliding door that opens the rest of it, across where the closet would be. So about two-thirds of this room is exposed on the inner side as well as the whole outer wall, the full width of the house for those southwest breezes.

Riess: This was done in both Firebaugh and Yuba City?

DeMars: Yes. Now Firebaugh was one of the first ones where we got rid of that hexagon siteplan. Here's some more of the town.

Riess: You used parallel lines of houses, which are referred to also by the German term, zeilenbau. For you that was a step after the hexagonal shapes.

DeMars: Yes, but the reason for it mainly in this particular case was that this was the first place where we started using the parking bay, you see, to get rid of the circle. So this is a double-loaded parking bay, park on both sides of that. Down in the middle here there's a little toilet building. Here's the laundry. That's still central. Here's the baseball diamond.

Woodville

DeMars: Just to flip through this [portfolio] for a moment, here's the actual site plan, here's the actual air view. This is Tulare, the camp. And here are those little houses off the cul-de-sac. Finally, the next step is adding some of the zeilenbau, the townhouses.

Here is the plan of Woodville. As a matter of fact, I think that's actually my drawing. What I wanted to show you mainly is what happened to the community building finally. We decided we were doing a little "new town," and that ultimately maybe it would expand into this. So instead of coming into the project through the camp as the main thing, with these things as an addition, we tried to make the sense of a little town center right off the main roadway here. And it even has a little greenbelt, an alfalfa field with these typical reservoirs. This was to be a regional hospital, and in this particular case it took the plan from the one in Arizona.

Then in here was the community building, the school, some of the row houses, to try to get a little bit of enclosure to the center. We had a little cooperative store. Then you went through the office and registered to go into the camp. This is a version of this thing you saw at Firebaugh, with the rows of cabins. These are with little separate cabins. Here's the parking lot, here you go into a little cul-de-sac with a T-shape. And the cabins are grouped around that, toilets for each of these groups. I think that's in Texas, but it's the same organization as this piece in here.

Now I want you to just see what happened. Here is the community building at Woodville, with a six-room schoolhouse.

Riess: It feels like this is a different clientele that you're building for.

DeMars: Well, we were beginning to build for--.. Oh, also, we found that a lot of the other farmers and people living around the area would come to Saturday night dances and events. And they wanted them to, and these people would get acquainted with them and invite them. So we were trying to make this be a real community center for the rest of the area. It had quite a nice child care center on it. In the plan you can see here that the kitchen that served as the child care center was also used as a place for courses in nutrition and so forth, and doing canning, since most of them

would be allowed to take away anything from the fields that they wanted to. The farmers just said, "You can take away as much as you can carry back."

Here's the meeting room and stage. You can see some sort of contemporary cliches in here.

Riess: It's very modern, very good-looking.

DeMars: Well, this was sort of self-consciously--. But still, this is just the studs of the wall, diagonal sheathing on it, bracing whatever, just exposed, and plywood on the lower wall to make a kind of a wainscot. Here's the little nursery school. I've got a couple of photos of the inside with them serving lunch. We were down there one weekend when they were having a big celebration, and I took some of these pictures at the time. That's the little covered walk that connects it to the school wing.

Now, it's interesting to read Talbot Hamlin's assessment of this. Where is it?

[reading] In these Farm Security developments through the far western states there lies, I think, a great lesson for the everyday architect planning the everyday building. This particular kind of imaginative and creative approach to a problem in general and in detail is not by any law that I know of limited either to government finance or low-cost buildings. Certainly it's not necessary, because one has a little more money to spend, to become at once bound by old conceptions of doors and windows and walls and roofs.

These communities are human and attractive because their designers understood people and their needs and insisted that all of those needs, intellectual and emotional, as well as physical, should be taken care of. They're beautiful because they're designed by artists, to whom creation was not limited by any economic deadline, and to whom it is as necessary to think in creative form terms of a privy as of a community center. They are satisfactory because within their limitations of necessary economy, each practical problem was approached, not only as a means to a physical end, but also as a means to a new and beautiful creative form. [Pencil Points, November 1941]

Riess: Well said.

DeMars: Done with music.

Riess: Now, does your name come up in this article?

DeMars: At this point I'm not mentioned, although almost all of the illustrations, and interest, was in the work of our office. Understandable, but--of necessity, here was something NEW!

Riess: Sort of depersonalized.

DeMars: Well, we knew what we were doing, and really felt it was a group effort. After a while, certain of the architects became specialists. For instance, Hachiro Yuasa worked on the housing types. Ed Sweeting was doing the farm buildings, etc., pretty much on his own. Art Steiner, Dick Banwell, and William Edie could step in wherever needed. And I stuck my finger, or foot, in to keep the pot boiling. There were others, too, eight or ten of us in all.

Riess: But as a young architect you didn't need that sense of being published?

DeMars: In this book done in Zurich, my name and Cairns's appear.

Here is the little nursery school part of the community building.

Riess: I can't think of anything better. There's no way you could improve on it.

DeMars: Well, some credit should go to Richard Neutra for this part of the community building. His one-story, experimental school building in Los Angeles had received wide publicity, was included in Roth's book along with Chandler, among his twenty examples of "The New Architecture." The simplicity of concept made for minimum construction costs. It was the direct prototype for our adjacent six-room school building at Woodville, and for the same reasons it had great influence on typical school building programs elsewhere, particularly in California. And they should have it now. They needed these child care things then because the parents were out picking cotton, or whatever the devil they were doing. The same need is here today even in the city.

At Woodville, that's the clinic interior. And that was intended to be the outpatient element of a proposed regional hospital. Remember I showed you the view of the one in Arizona? The three types of houses, the Northwest, California, and then the Arizona ones. And here happens to be a view of adobes with a

metal roof and a ventilator on the top of it. [looking through a journal] I think our names are in here.

Riess: This article is reprinted from New Pencil Points, December, 1942. "After Shelter Comes Health." And you are truly up there in big print. "Clinic Building, Woodville, Vernon DeMars, District Architect, Nicholas Cirino, District Engineer."

DeMars: This shows the facilities. Here's that other photo of the examining rooms and so forth. And we had, you know, even some little Aaltoesque touches here and there.

Riess: Aaltoesque, that's wonderful.

DeMars: [laughter] Well, I'd come back from seeing his work. Creeping vines on a bunch of spindles.

Here's the interior.

Riess: Of a mobile clinic.

DeMars: Yes. Now, one of the last buildings, that we didn't do--in fact, the first building we didn't do--John Funk was working for us on this. It was a 100-bed hospital in Fresno that would be a central hospital for California.

Riess: Called an FSA Rural Hospital, yes.

DeMars: The war was coming on and so forth, and it just didn't happen. But this is the one at Eleven-Mile Corner, where they took the clinic building of the camp and we added these wings and so forth to it. This was done at an incredibly low cost per bed. I think \$1,000 a bed. That means it cost \$60,000 for the building, you see. Can you imagine any hospital today? Of course, you have to upgrade it from there. The rooms had plywood walls, and so forth. But you can see in the view here--a kitchen, operating rooms. They were pulled apart to get the maximum benefit of cross-ventilation.

Riess: Has this survived?

DeMars: I'm pretty sure that this would have survived.

Riess: And did Chandler survive?

DeMars: Chandler did not survive. I was down there fifteen years after it was built, giving a talk at Tempe, the architecture department. I was asked by the head there, "What would you like to see?" I said, "I'd like to visit Chandler if we could." This was twenty

or twenty-five miles away. We drove down there. The week before it had been demolished by bulldozers, just pushing it over. They didn't save anything. And here were great piles of the dirt and adobe with pieces of pipe sticking out of them. Well, they did save the little community building and laundry. It was no longer than a small residence, and it was across the project road, so a little remodeling made it into a little home that would fit right into the proposed subdivision.

Casa Grande##

DeMars: Casa Grande was something already being talked about. (This is Mineral King Ranch in California, which is the same thing.)

Riess: "Full-time cooperative farm," is how they describe it. [looking at document]

DeMars: Yes. And this was done secondarily, after Chandler. Chandler came first. Casa Grande was being done just about the same time as Chandler, the adobe one in Arizona. And what happened, the evolution--if I can compact it into as little as possible--was that they wanted to resettle sixty families that had come from the Dust Bowl and so forth.

Riess: "A 3,500-acre cooperative farm affords full-time work for sixty families." This is Casa Grande Valley Farms, Incorporated.

DeMars: Yes, in Arizona. It was to have been divided up into sixty farmsteads, sixty houses, sixty wells, sixty tractors, and all of this. They were working with the University of Arizona on the economic plan of the thing, and they said, "Why do you suppose you find no single-family farms in this area? It's all industrialized farming. You can't do it here. We can't afford to sink sixty wells and so forth. You've got to find a way to compete with the big industrialized farms. You're going to have to do it the same way somehow. You're going to have to farm the land as a large thing."

So as they worked on it they figured, well, why couldn't they simply have a corporation in which the farmers put in their daily work working under--they would have a board of directors, they would decide what they were going to plant and they would do it. The experts among them would take care of the dairy and so forth. In other words, this was a collective farm, you might say. It was not because they'd all been reading Marx or whatever.

Again, it was arrived at the same way. I suppose, I'm convinced that this was so, they just analyzed the economics of it and this seemed like a thing worth trying. So this was one of the experiments that was tried. In fact, I understood it was the largest cooperative farm experiment of this sort to be tried in this country. It was a great success for a number of years, six to nine. When the war came along, and when it was making millions, literally, they won prizes at the State Fair with their dairy herd and all this kind of thing.

Here, incidentally, in this corner here, shows the village in the middle. This is the farm land. And here's the town of Florence, the biggest town in that area. So you can see, the size of the Casa Grande village part is almost the size of Florence. Here's what it looks like. We had a half-acre for each one. We were told by our guys that the farmers in the group wanted a half-acre, they thought. But the farm administrators were saying, they're never going to be able to farm more than half of that, working on the cooperative as well. So we will arrange this so that you can cut the backs of their lot off if they decide to, which is what they did almost immediately. But it had the house, a little garage. And it was quite a decent house.

A book was written about this after the war by Edward Banfield, if you know the name. He was an anthropologist-sociologist, but very much into planning. Because this again was a thing coming up, testing out how people lived in planned communities. What happened, when this was making millions the members of the cooperative, that is, the farmers, got together and said, "Let's sell it, and then we can all have our own farm." And they proceeded to do this.

It was very involved, because the families that had been put there had to pay for it, it wasn't a gift. So they were paying us [the F.S.A.] off over a period of time. They thought that they had earned enough, that each of them would have a large enough equity in it. Well, they did get something out of it. Much of it went to the lawyers that were liquidating the thing. Oh, very complicated with the government and so on. I don't know what happened to it finally, what they did. But anyway, Banfield took this on. It's a book this thick, called Government Project. At the end he interviewed these people afterwards, found some of them living on ditch banks again. And it was total; none of them got their farms, I don't think. I mean, how do you buck the large farms?

Then also, when he analyzes their backgrounds, they had sort of a hard time finding the families to get into this thing in the first place. They were not by either practice or temperament

cooperators. They were rugged individualists. They had been farmers this way. And you don't sell--you know, the people running the co-op down here, it's a different breed of people, in a sense. Unless they are into that and have a community feeling, it's hard to invent it for them. In fact, it can't be done at all.

Walter Packard writes about this. He and Tugwell were working on a book together, and I think the book was trying to analyze how to make this thing work. And in fact, Banfield says that talking to the government people--he interviewed people on the farm, the people who put it together, people in the university and all this--they thought if they had another chance they could make it work this time, because now they knew what happened. But his conclusion was that the failure was the failure of just the people's temperament and their inability to--what they wanted to do was disappear into that little town.

Riess: What do you mean?

DeMars: I mean that they wanted to become absorbed into the culture of the little town, but this whole operation set them apart. It was so different. The houses were so different. Everything was different about it. The concept of it was different. And here with this one group, their friendships were not made in a cross section of a community. Everyone's husband was working on this one farm and it was like a company town, even though they were the board of directors.

Riess: You said that they were rugged individualists.

DeMars: Which made it difficult for them to submerge any of their feelings for their own expression.

Riess: But the corporation wanted them all to submerge themselves.

DeMars: Enough to make it work and to continue. Oh, it got to be this family not liking that family and "someone didn't feel the other was working as hard as he was." He mentions some of the wives dropping out of the little women's club that would meet in the community center building. They had started some quilting bees. (I saw this going on in the camps, an old Oklahoma tradition, I guess.) Anyway, some of the younger women dropped out--they were ashamed that they had never really learned to sew.

They were all stuck with being this one thing, working for this company town, even though they were part of the company. At one point Banfield said, "Perhaps contributing as much as anything else to the failure of this project was the little village of

pastel-colored houses in the middle which were so different than those in the neighboring town, even though they were made of adobe and were cool and had refrigerators and all sorts of things that many people in the town didn't have." And that was about all he had to say about it. So I thought, "Well, so much for good planning and design--"Live and learn.

Riess: That's interesting. Sure, there's partly the architecture, but they just couldn't be comfortable being part of this communal system.

DeMars: Yes. Now, if it had been their idea--. I'm kind of sad to see that the Co-op in Berkeley has finally sort of gone to pieces. I never was particularly one to join that sort of thing, I suppose by temperament. But I'm all in favor of it. I like what they had done in Sweden with it.

Riess: Would they say that they should have screened these people more?

DeMars: Well, I think they would have said that, yes. I think that that might have been one of the things that they should have found out. Here is the way it is going to work, "What do you think?" Well now, they might not have said what they thought because they were so desperate to find a place. This seemed like a nice idea, but maybe they didn't realize that temperamentally they weren't suited to it.

They tried the same thing in California. This is the Mineral King Ranch. And here [looking at picture] was one of the houses for this. Now this, we thought, Corbu would be proud if he saw it. (He has a cooperative farm in one of his books.) These were some existing buildings, but these are the houses. This was just for fifteen families. Well, it turned out, as I understand it, this was even worse, because with fifteen families there really isn't anyone else, they're stuck with each other to a greater extent than sixty families would be. They had a little community building here.

Riess: So did they sell out?

DeMars: I don't really know what happened. I didn't even know this had happened at Casa Grande, because I had gone on east, the war. I didn't learn until I came back in 1950, you see, that that had happened to it, having gone on with other things.

Here again we were using flaps on the bedroom wall. There's the plan. We put the kitchen and bathroom inside--you can see it here--with a clerestory window that could be opened from below. This was at the highest point in this house. All the ceilings

sloped up to it so the hot air and kitchen odors and so forth all got out above. A big cornered screen porch on the back side was for both laundry and dining, and with a couple of beds for the kids. So there are two bedrooms, and this is thought of as a third bedroom. It was really quite a nice little house. I suppose these were kept. That's on the outskirts of Tulare, the camp down there.

Riess: A part of all of this is the social experiment end of it. But that's not what you went in thinking about.

DeMars: Well, of course, it was an input into the program, you might say. It was easy to see that--these two things were obviously--they had the same problems as they've had in Russia. Packard speaks to this. People say cooperatives are nothing new. You have a cotton gin cooperative and other cooperatives down the valley. The farmers are doing this all the time. But he said, ah, but those are consumer cooperatives. They're consuming a service. And the degree to which any one of them contribute doesn't really matter to the rest of them, as long as there's enough of them to support this service. It would be the same thing with the Co-op store in Berkeley. No one is watching to see that you buy every bit of your stuff from the store, or to see that you buy enough to keep it. If you're going to drop out altogether there are enough of them, they couldn't be bothered.

But when you're working and you're all getting paid the same amount, then what is your incentive to work harder? And what about the guy who really does want to work twelve hours or fifteen hours, and a lot of them don't want to work that long. He's resenting the fact that he can't exploit this. So that's really built into the system. But it's interesting that Packard came to this kind of conclusion. If you can find a way to run that farm so that the degree of your participation counts--. You might get paid by the management for the amount of hours you do work. If you want to work more hours, you get paid a bit more for it, and so on. Then it ups your amount of the profits. You have to have a profit motive. And that's understandable.

"Harvest Gypsies"

[Interview 4: January 19, 1988]##

DeMars: I got your little note about the Harvest Gypsies. Isn't that rather moving?

Riess: Very moving. It's a wonderful little book.

DeMars: I'd met Steinbeck two or three times during those years. Well, I can't say I knew him or that he would remember who I was, even.

Riess: You met him when you were out in the field?

DeMars: No, he'd be in the office in San Francisco, the Farm Security office, come in there to talk to the publicity people and so forth.

Riess: About what?

DeMars: Oh, about maybe some writing and things, progress if any. He would have known these people I guess from the first contacts with Tom Collins. We met Tom Collins at an early stage too, because he was the manager of the camp. And remember Steinbeck calls it Wheatpatch?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: And of course the name is Weedpatch, which I think is even better. I suppose he changed that, poetic license, just not to identify it too much more closely.

Riess: Was Collins very helpful in your thinking?

DeMars: Well, yes, and it was Collins who suggested we do some little houses, you see, because people were supposed to have gone away when winter came, go back to where they lived. And of course, they didn't live anywhere else, and this didn't seem to have occurred to anybody at that point. Or, I guess, the feeling that it wasn't their responsibility to provide any more permanent housing. Even the government. But it seems so logical, you had sewage disposal facilities, you had electricity, you had a water system, all of these things right there in the camp, and they figured that you could just tap onto that, and build the most inexpensive little houses with a little piece of land to them. And that's the way we started off on that, that minimum. We called it the "Minimal House."

Riess: Well, in the Harvest Gypsies book, which we're referring to, Steinbeck makes the case that unless you have a real house over your head, that you're going to sink into ruin in some period of time, whether it's two months, ten months, two years.

DeMars: Oh, yes. And the psychological morale--well, I can imagine that giving birth to a baby on a piece of carpet under a tarp, and so forth--and really no one did feel it was their responsibility to

do anything about these people. Others that had been harvesting--well, they were bringing in Mexicans and so forth--I don't know where they were supposed to live.

Riess: You knew Tom Collins, but did you meet any of the farm owners?

DeMars: I don't think we did. This was taking place a few steps above us. You see, in the nature of things in those days, not even our boss, who was called the district engineer, I don't think that they were meeting with him either. This was the construction production planning outfit, but we were getting our programming from the people who were in the field and working with them, and from the directors like Jonathan Garst, you see. He was the regional director.

Riess: Were you encouraged to meet any of the families for whom you were providing?

DeMars: We did. I don't think we were encouraged to, but we would ask the manager to let us talk to some of the people. And then at later times, after we'd done some buildings, I remember going down to the little houses in the outskirts of Shafter--that's the place I just visited recently--and we went around and rang the doorbells just to see how it had worked out. We just told them we were connected with the FSA. We didn't want to tell them we had designed the building necessarily! We sort of felt it along.

But they would tell us, you know, "This worked, and that didn't," and "what they really needed was this, and that." When we'd come down the managers would have a whole list of things that were wrong or could be corrected, or "what they needed new was this, and there was a real need for such-and-such." It might be a new building, or the notion of a kind of a library or something that seemed to me that when you read Steinbeck there, you think that that would be quite a ways along. Well, it was, but not all that long, a couple of years. When we got to the point that we had a whole collection, we'd added a little building where the women could meet and do quilting, and they said if they could have that, it would have been a great help, and it didn't cost much of anything to provide a thing like that.

Landscape Architects in the FSA Office

Riess: Did you form into teams when you worked on a project?

DeMars: Well, yes and no. It was a very small group in the architectural section. Here's a picture of us, "Vernon DeMars, Corwin Mocine, and Burton Cairns," taken at Chandler, Arizona, on a very hot day. We went down on a field trip, and that was--well, the team, the others were the draftsmen in the office, and they wouldn't have been more than [counting] eight, and maybe a couple more. But from this picture, you can get an idea. It was about 120 in the shade at that time, and the only places that had air conditioners were the big hotels in Phoenix.

Riess: You're wearing pith helmets in this picture.

DeMars: Yes, and I remember walking out in the street from our hotel, which was called the Westward Ho House. And we said, "What kind of a ho house is this?" [laughter] But you'd be in there, and when you'd walk out the door you'd feel the warm air sort kind of creeping up your pant leg, as this cool air would just sort of run out this way. It was just like you're sinking into warm mud, and then pretty soon it's all over.

Sometimes back in the San Francisco office we'd say, "You know, maybe we're overdoing this climatic thing, all the flaps, and all this concern for the heat. Maybe we could use regular ordinary windows, and maybe we're overstressing the need for those air coolers." And then on a trip like this we'd send a wire back and say, "Don't change anything!" [laughs] And we'd come back, and say, "You wouldn't believe it!" The heat is really just so incredible down there. Northern Arizona and New Mexico, that is not that order of heat, it's fine, it's warm, but it's sunny dry warm. But this--this is dry, God knows, but it is really furnace-type heat.

Riess: I'm trying to understand whether you were ahead of your time in the Farm Security Administration, in terms of working with planners and landscape architects, and having a coordinated design team.

DeMars: Yes, I think it was a little bit--it wasn't the sort of standard way that things were done. Although we didn't quite know it, because I don't think any of us had much experience in offices or anything. In a typical office there was a degree of collaboration, but it was sort of the architects doing their planning first, and then getting a landscape architect to do the bushes. Any architect with any sensitivity thought he knew what to do. He'd get the landscape architects to name the bushes later. Because that's what they did. [laughter]

Riess: In your FSA work were you already modeling a kind of cooperative working with other professionals that was unique to FSA, that you then carried into Telesis?

DeMars: Yes, in a way. But I would say that in the first year I was just another draftsman, drawing tent platforms. Foldable privies, with screen door hooks and so forth, made of plywood, and you could fold them and put them in a truck.

That year's version of several new camps got us going on a thing, and some working back and forth with the engineers who were doing the layouts, and so forth, who were right in the office. I would imagine at the very beginning there that they were considered more important than the architects, because they were laying out the roads, and water system.

Riess: Did they make the architects feel less important?

DeMars: Well, no. It was just that the scope of things we were doing was rather limited at the very initial starting, that part of the program.

I think the most elaborate thing we did was roofing over the dance platform at Weedpatch to keep the rain off for weekends mostly, for the Saturday night square dance. This platform, about fifty foot square and a foot or so off the ground, had a rail and bench running around it. We did put a roof over it, as they asked, and left it open all around. Of course, in winter the rain blew in. "Couldn't we close in the sides, and while we were at it, could we sort of add a stage at one end and toilets on one side and a kitchen on the other?" So we did, and this began doubling during the week as a child care center. This was the genesis of the several evolving community building types leading up to the one at Woodville. But the other things were a manager's house, the shed for the two or three little pickup trucks and things that they had as part of the equipment, and there was kind of a clinic from the very beginning, but a very modest little building.

The landscape architects, a lot of their work was with the engineers on the site planning, and working with us as we got going. We had some ideas about maybe layout too, and where the buildings might go. This was pretty well along. We were all friends, and we'd be talking about these things, and we'd go together on these inspection trips.

Just quickly to summarize the way the thing worked: Corwin was in at the very set-up of the office, and so was I, and Fran Violich. That was for a year or so. Corwin was then transferred

to Washington for a while, and then was sent down to Arizona in a semi-permanent role down there while these things were under construction. So he was beginning to have a kind of supervisorial role in the field. Incidentally, Corwin ended up as city planning director for Phoenix for a few years after leaving the FSA, having made a good impression, I guess, as well as some good contacts!

It must have gone for about two years, '36, '37. And then I took off and went to Europe on the trip. Apparently, the whole organization folded up for a while. When I came back after six months, in between it had moved to San Francisco and we were in a building on 2nd Street. When I came back from Europe the office had started up again, and it seems to me that we were still in this building on 2nd Street, the Wells Fargo building. Fran Violich was there again for maybe a year more, something around there, and then Garrett took his place. And there was a younger man, Milton Butts, also a landscape architect. [laughs]

[looking at list] I notice they don't list--. I'll have to fill in some of the names that were left out. But this was supposed to list all the site planners, architects, and landscape architects in June 1943.

We were all working in the same room together, with the engineers. You didn't have a conference. They'd come over to our desk or vice versa. Right in the office, we'd work maybe directly--of course there was someone in charge of the engineering group, but his draftsman, who was maybe doing the actual work on a particular layout of the thing, would sit down with ours.

Riess: What did Fran Violich bring to the group?

DeMars: Well, you know that Fran had a degree in city planning from Harvard as well as his landscape degree from Berkeley. Site planning was a very important part of our operation, but was relatively new as a design element for anyone but civil engineers. When I got back in 1938, he had already laid out the camp part at Yuba City. His role, his job here, was to plan a road system, locate buildings, trees--all the physical elements--specify the plant materials, and then go out and see that it was properly done in the field.

Riess: If you'd graduated feeling that anyone who could design a building could certainly indicate on the plan where the trees should be, then you had to relinquish that role?

DeMars: Yes, somewhat. Well, I'm saying that that was almost more an attitude than-- Under the Beaux Arts system you were doing "entourage"--that's the word. We would do summer residences for

an ambassador or something. It just isn't sitting on bare ground; you add some trees and so forth around it, with watercolor, at the last minute. We'd seen trees, you know, so, "a high tree here, and a rounded tree here." We'd copy from other places. It wasn't given much importance. We knew that there was something called landscape architecture. They do now in schools, certainly.

And then there was a way, when you did the rendering of the site plan and things, you had to have a setting to make your plan stand out, and big blocks of green watercolor wash would suggest the big tree, and that's the woods, and here's the opening, and there are paths leading off through it, and leading up to it, and so forth. I guess we recognized that if this were a real situation we'd have to get into more depth about what kind of trees and bushes and things they were. But you know, we were in our twenties, and we'd seen city halls and lawns and so on. But it was not made much of a point of.

Riess: Right. You must have had to step back and let the landscape architect do his thing.

DeMars: Well, yes, that's what they were there for. We knew and respected the fact that it had involved as much background and training as our field: plant materials, soils, drainage, etc., and I guess we were so busy doing our little piece of it, and the others were right there. Let me show you--in Yuba City, when I got back from our trip, this was all laid out, so Fran had been responsible for the modification of the site plan scheme.

Riess: And this is one of the hexagonal ones.

DeMars: This is a different version of it, where there are two lobes to the thing, but by that time we had designed the community building, the clinic. You can see it here.

Riess: He had actually laid it out.

DeMars: He had laid it out. And then, when I got back I had heard that they wanted to do some permanent housing right from the beginning in the manner of what we had done in Chandler, but for California. Therefore it wouldn't be adobe. We would modify the building material. It would naturally be conventional wood frame. I had just come back from this trip full of Corbusier and so forth, and this is the building.

Riess: These trees, were they there?

DeMars: Those were there. That's the point, you see. This particular group, there was this grove of pecans, and we'd gone up to the

site, and I was very filled with the zeilenbau dynamics from housing that we had seen in Holland and Germany and so forth, and that just seemed like the obvious thing. Catherine Bauer saying, "There's no modern housing in America." We thought, "Well, we'll show her."

We went up to the site with Burton Cairns, and together thought it would be a great idea to make a little kind of park for the multi-family housing, which would be out away from the trees, so they could get winter sun and so forth, but that this would be the focus. In here they have their own little community building in the middle of this. It was also the central laundry for the permanent housing group, and not only saved the costs of providing separate facilities for each of the thirty-two families but was effective as a socializing element.

Riess: What are you saying that the landscape architect had to do with this? It sounds like you and Burt Cairns did it.

DeMars: Well, I'm trying to think. I think that either Fran agreed with it, and was along at the same time, or [laughter]--. I think this was the point: that just as today, we know that each of us has a field, and although Fran feels that he knows what he wants to go into his house or whatever, I would respect very much Fran's concept of the garden and so forth.

Depression, Dustbowl, and the WPA##

Riess: You said you met Steinbeck in this kind of casual way. How about Carey McWilliams? Did you ever meet him?

DeMars: Yes, I'm sure I did.

Riess: Did he ask for information from you to help write his books? Do you remember what kind of interchange you had with him?

DeMars: I don't think it was more than just being able to say that I'd met him. The same with Steinbeck, and probably he knew at that time that I was one of the architects that had roughly designed the little houses and things--which he actually talks about, doesn't he, in that series of articles for the News? He mentioned it.

Riess: Yes. Governor Olson was a great supporter of all this.

DeMars: I never met him.

Riess: Had you ever heard of this group that is referred to in Harvest Gypsies as the Simon J. Lubin Society?

DeMars: I don't believe so, at that time.

Riess: A group of progressives trying to assist the migrant cause.

DeMars: I know that the bete noires of the time were the Associated Farmers, who really--this [migrant camps] was the thing to be stopped. At first. And then I think a little bit later on they decided it wasn't such a bad idea to have the government providing this housing, it was off their neck and so forth. The only degree of sympathy we had with them was that there was no way that any one of them could spend a quarter million dollars to house the migrants for all that area, and even if they got themselves together--well, they could get together and provide for it, but they hadn't. It was not done. Many of them did have some kind of housing, an attempt to go a little bit further than just a place to pitch tents and things.

I had some pictures taken later of a whole bunch of little plywood cabin things, which were actually bigger than the ones we were doing, but there was not one tree, blade of grass, or anything. It was absolutely barren. It depressed anyone who came in who had to stay there.

Riess: Well, this was the Depression period, but the farmers were still certainly making healthy profits, it's not that they couldn't have afforded to do it.

DeMars: Right. But I think that they would have felt that this would have been not macho--though the term wasn't being used.

Riess: It would be too soft-hearted?

DeMars: Soft-hearted, yes. What would their friends think of them if they started doing things like that? As Steinbeck points out, they thought of these people as peons, and they felt that's what they needed, a peon class that would come in and do it, and would disappear afterwards, and take care of themselves and move on.

Riess: But the reality is that these were dislocated American family farmers.

DeMars: Yes, but it's changed. Now that those have become, many of them, at least part absorbed, and many of them successfully, absorbed into the ongoing culture, now we're back to the peon idea again.

Riess: Germano Milano mentioned an Architects' and Draftsmans' Society. This was still in the Depression, and it was an attempt to figure out what architects could be doing to make money, and whether they might unionize. Were you involved in that?

DeMars: No, I remember Gerry Milano very well. Did you know him?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: I would say that he and, for instance, Hachiro Yuasa, and there was another Japanese--we were a very close little group, and when they went off to the relocation camps, we really didn't quite believe it. We corresponded a bit for a while, and so on. Yuasa and Milano--there was enough work on versions of our new housing that that was sort of his specialty, and of course, we were working with him. But after deciding what we wanted--and I say "we," Burt and I would decide--. Just as you do in an office, you have the architect, and you have people with a particular project that they're working on. You're calling the tune; sometimes you'd make sketches of it, or you've been out in the field.

I don't know that they--we might have gotten them out into the field a few times just to see what was going on, rather than being sent out to manage the thing. In other words, the actual inspections, just like this trip here. [looking at photograph] There is Burt, and I, who had actually drawn up and designed the thing, and here is Corwin. Burt was in charge, and Corwin was seeing about the landscape architecture. So we were down there [in Arizona] for more or less an inspection trip, a final one.

Riess: It sounds like, because you had gotten right into the FSA work, the dilemma of being the unemployed architect and being to the point of wanting to unionize and get some control, that was not an issue for you?

DeMars: True, but it had been. There was a year or so before when I can't remember what I was doing, because I was out of work, and I was not--except for my occasional Indian dance--not getting any income particularly. At one period, I think I told you about planning to get a group of real Indians together to make a trip to Europe.

Riess: Did you do anything that was directly related to WPA? I know that artists were put to work for WPA, but I wondered if architects were.

DeMars: Well, that's where we lead into this business I've touched on about Chandler. When Walter Packard first had been brought to Washington as the director of the Rural Resettlement Administration, Joe Weston was the regional architect for the

western states, District 6, Region IX, California, Oregon, and Arizona. And he was located in Los Angeles. The district included Washington and Idaho. Mrs. Roosevelt's thing, the subsistence homesteads, Chandler was that version of it. There were already also the Greenbelt towns, in Washington and elsewhere. This was the urban resettlement part. (Other projects were named Greendale and Greenhills, etc.).

The first town, Greenbelt, Maryland, had artists involved in it; on the school in the middle of town there had been some sculptured panels, little bas reliefs illustrating the Preamble to the Constitution, and things like that. A lot of the artists were rather left-leaning, shall we say, and so this woman artist, the sculptor, when it came time to illustrate the concept "to establish justice throughout the land," had a scene of a jury on one side with their heads turned away while a negro is being lynched over on the other. She had carved each illustration of the different parts of the Constitution. Well, that was being commented on. I don't know whether they finally took it off the building or not, but that approach did puzzle some people, including me! It must have more than puzzled some congressmen, what with Greenbelt only a few miles outside Washington.

I got into this when Weston and his chief designer, Christopher Choate, whom I mentioned before, were planning the kind of Mexican hacienda for Chandler. And that was to use WPA artists to do the sculpture. Then also, the fact that it was going to be built of adobe, that was part of it. So that's the WPA right there. We felt it was a question of whether this limited budget for housing migratory farm workers way down there can afford a percentage for murals and that kind of an enrichment. We felt a little trellis by the front door was our concession to something more than just the bare bones.

A Review of F.S.A. Origins [section added separately by DeMars]

DeMars: Walter Packard was an agricultural economist who had taught at Berkeley and consulted in Mexico. He had been brought to Washington by Rexford Tugwell, a longtime friend, a fellow economist, and a member of Roosevelt's "Brain Trust," a small clique of advisors to the President whose job it was to come up with pragmatic proposals for things that would put people back to work again during the depths of the Depression. Among projects already underway were the resettling of families from ruined and eroded farm land in the Appalachians to new farms, with guidance in land management and with new facilities, houses and barns, etc.

This was financed by loans and mortgages, ultimately to be paid back to the government. The abandoned lands were to be returned to reforestation, wild-life refuges, etc.

Mrs. Roosevelt had initiated a program of "subsistence homesteads," little mini-farms in small clusters which, as the name implies, were intended to greatly supplement cash incomes from other employment. These projects employed architects, engineers, etc., with WPA funds, in roles similar to ours in the West, but on more conventional problems.

In the cities, slum clearance would remove blight and provide the need for replacement housing, sometimes on the same site, sometimes in new communities altogether. Again, families were given the opportunity to be "resettled" in new housing. European examples were being studied for solutions to similar problems.

Tugwell proposed the building of several new towns, planned not simply as markets for speculative builders, but to incorporate from the start the range of services and amenities to make a viable community. They would be protected from the typical American speculative urban sprawl by a green belt of agricultural land surrounding them. Thus the "Greenbelt Towns." Four were proposed, starting with Greenbelt, Maryland, which was built a few miles outside Washington, D.C. The second was Greenhills, Ohio, also built, as was Greendale, Wisconsin. A fourth project never got past the drawing boards. In the meantime, many architects, engineers and draftsmen had been put to work--for the most part centralized in Washington, D.C. Conceptually, along with slum clearance, this was urban resettlement.

All of this was strongly opposed by conservative elements in Congress and by the real estate industry: government moving into land development, construction, building houses for rent, etc., etc. This was socialism! Maybe even communism!! Certainly un-American!

Rural resettlement was obviously an altogether different problem, in spite of any similarities. The two programs were grouped under Tugwell as top administrator of the Resettlement Administration. Packard had come to Washington as administrator of Rural Resettlement rather late in this program. I don't believe he had been in the job much longer than I had, that is, a couple of months. I don't know the background of all that, why he was brought in. I think it was probably because Tugwell knew his abilities, and he was from California, and the migrant problem had rather suddenly become a critical issue of the administration.

The whole management apparatus, including the engineering and architectural division, had been put together with some haste and urgency with offices in downtown Berkeley. Jonathan Garst, also a friend of Packard's, became Regional Director for Region IX--the three western states, California, Oregon, and Arizona. Packard picked Burton Cairns to head a small architectural team to augment the civil engineering needed to build a camp. Burt brought me in right at the beginning. We had been classmates in Berkeley at the architectural school, and after graduation we rented a small rear lot house in Berkeley for a while. This was both office and living quarters where we designed and had built a couple of houses. But this was the extent of our practical experience--considered adequate at that time for the job ahead.

It could not have been more than two or three weeks after opening the Berkeley office that a telegram was received, marked "Urgent," saying that Cairns, DeMars, [Corwin] Mocine, and [Ed] Sweeting were to come to Washington immediately for a conference. We took "immediately" to mean like "right now!" We bought airline tickets that same afternoon and left the next morning.

Our arrival at headquarters that afternoon seemed to catch everyone by surprise. "You came by air?" We hadn't even waited for the written authorization for travel by train, and the other attendees, Joe Weston and [Christopher] Choate from Los Angeles, weren't even there yet. We learned about written authorization from that incident. We were forced to pay the difference between air travel and train out of our own pockets, and our return to California after a few days was by train. We had been called back to see the designs, which Weston and Choate had done for Chandler, Arizona, the Mexican hacienda described earlier. Our staff was expected to finish the drawings for construction, because Weston and Choate were both leaving government employ since the regional office would now be in Berkeley, not Los Angeles.

Shortly after our return west I was asked to return to Washington and prepare to stay for a month or two. This was when Mr. Packard asked for some alternate design for Chandler. I believe it was in this same period that I worked on the initial designs for the Casa Grande Houses.

However, something more than rethinking Chandler took place while I was there. Congressional conservatives had won out with a vengeance. The Resettlement Administration was dismantled altogether. The fourth Greenbelt town was cancelled, as were some of the projects of Rural Resettlement. The others would be carried on under the Department of Agriculture with a new name, the Farm Security Administration. We survived, but Tugwell

didn't. Our new top boss was now Henry Wallace, head of the Department of Agriculture (and later Vice President). The removal of Tugwell had now been accomplished.

Either as a reward by Roosevelt, or acceding to further pressure from Congress, after a short period of private consulting on agricultural matters Tugwell was appointed Governor of Puerto Rico. He did have interests and contacts there, and had been a consultant to some large sugar companies. But his removal from immediate access as advisor to the President had been accomplished.

Catherine Bauer and Bill Wurster

Riess: We've mentioned Catherine Bauer. She came in 1938-1939 to lecture at Berkeley. I wondered how she was drawn into the community.

DeMars: Well, she was the one who wrote the definitive book on housing, that anybody that was dealing with it certainly read as background.⁷

You were asking me early on what books were influential and so forth. Well, on the trip to Europe I had with me The Culture of Cities, Mumford's book, and was using it as a syllabus kind of in the places we were visiting. I didn't know of anybody that told me what I should see. We just were making this grand trip, Art Steiner and I.

Art and I were very close friends. Both of us had steady lady friends with whom we planned to get married, and my thought was once I get married it will be some years before I can do this. I've got a little money, and I want this as background. And I haven't seen the housing we've read about, and so forth, besides not having been to Europe at all. He had been there, but I think while he was still in school and was not very interested in housing as such at that time. In fact, it was enough earlier, it may have been six or seven years earlier than that.

Riess: Was he a classmate of yours?

⁷Modern Housing by Catherine Bauer, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934.

DeMars: Yes. We were in the same class. He had a great design flair, and in fact, he was my colleague on doing the Woodville building, the big one with the school attached to it and so forth, which was the culmination of our finally pulling it all together and making a building out of it. He was the actual one who was drawing it up and working on it. Well, when I use this term, I suppose I'm trying to not suggest I only told him what we wanted and he designed it totally. But you work closely enough with someone, and they have to sort of agree with you sufficiently that they go along with it. And then their ideas come into the thing, and "Hey, that's great, let's do it that way," and so on.

Riess: You're saying that you were looking at housing, and what about Catherine Bauer?

DeMars: I doubt that I met her on the first trip when she first came out to Berkeley. I was working there. But I felt--.

The reason I'm hesitating here is that I know that our projects at Yuba City and at Chandler, and maybe it was just the Chandler one, I don't think there was anything else quite like that in the country that sort of took on this European look or approach. This was before the federal public housing programs had started. Of course, there were examples of group housing done by a city, or by limited dividend corporations, things like in New York City, which would be sort of medium or high-rise, or some of the things in the Greenbelt towns. We felt those were really not very--we felt they were kind of old-fogyish, and so on. We thought, gee, if Catherine Bauer only knew what we were doing, and how we had taken her ideas and so on.

Riess: Who actually introduced you to her?

DeMars: Well, it would have been through Bill Wurster, I guess.

Riess: Was Bill a close friend of yours?

DeMars: Not until we got into Telesis. I'd met him before that. When I first got out of school I went to the office and tried to get a job. There weren't any jobs, he had a half a dozen draftsmen or fewer. But he was very cordial and took time, showed what they were working on then, pulled out the drawer and showed the drawings and so forth. But there were no jobs. Besides, I think that he couldn't afford to train someone who would really be only a trainee, you might say.

Our usefulness at the office level of detailing some simple houses would not have been very great, from what we learned in the Beaux Arts system. You obviously ought to know how frame

construction goes together, and so on, and we didn't know that much about it, from that perspective.

Riess: It would be because you had the connection with Bill Wurster that you met Catherine, you're saying?

DeMars: It may have been through Bill, but it may have been at one of these events, and maybe she began to know about our work in Farm Security.

Riess: What kind of events?

DeMars: Oh, a lecture, or some kind of meeting affair. Maybe Fran and Jack would be able to fill out.⁸

Riess: I'm interested in the social network. One of the comments about Catherine Bauer is that she was able to be as effective as she was because of her personal charms and her social skills and the way that she fit into the architectural community, like a glove. Now, what is that all about?

DeMars: Well, later on I knew them well enough that Bill used to introduce Betty and me as the only ones that really could prove that they were married, because we were the witnesses at their marriage in Seattle. It was on a field trip--is this on?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: We, the F.S.A., had two projects, one in Idaho and one in Washington. I was the district architect by this time, the district being the five western states. I inherited the job when Burt Cairns was killed in an auto accident on a similar fieldtrip. I was to make a final inspection of these things, and I thought, well, I'll make it a little vacation trip. I drove my own car, and Betty went along.

Catherine--I guess we must have planned this somewhat together--she was going up to see the Grand Coulee Dam, and to see what was happening with the homesteading project that this was serving, among other things. People could homestead land there. So we planned to meet, to visit these things together, and then we'd visit the Grand Coulee. After the Grand Coulee, then we were heading for Seattle, to come on home. Catherine was staying over another day or so there, and we didn't know quite what she was doing next.

⁸See March 1, 1989, Interview with Violich, Kent, DeMars on Catherine Bauer Wurster.

When we got to Seattle we hadn't had any laundry done for some days, and we were driving down one of the hills in Seattle before breakfast, wondering whether we could find a laundry, because we were going to go to Mount Rainier. We thought we could get it done overnight. We were arguing back and forth and Betty said, "Say, isn't that Catherine, and it looks like Bill over there on the sidewalk?" We were going down this way, see, and she could see them walking up. We turned around, made a U-turn, came back, pulled up, and said, "Well, hello Bill, and Catherine. What are you doing here?" I mean, just jokingly, you see.

Bill said, "We're getting married." Catherine looked up and said, "We are?" That may have been true. We joked and so forth about it, and I don't know whether she said, "This is the first I've known about it," or something. The next thing was to find a justice of the peace. They had had breakfast, I think. [laughs] But it took the rest of the morning to find a justice of the peace. Then I guess we had a brunch all together. We were pretty hungry by that time!

Riess: That's a wonderful story. When had you gotten married?

DeMars: In April 1939, not too long after I got back from Europe.

Riess: And when was this trip to Seattle?

DeMars: That was in 1940. [Bill and Catherine Wurster married August 13, 1940.]

I would say that we were very close to Bill and Catherine in those years ahead. Well, he brought me up to MIT. But before that, when I went to Washington for the National Housing Agency [1942-1943], we went up to Boston a couple of times and visited with them. They had some little--not marital spats exactly, but Bill could be pretty, well, you could say almost he had an iron whim. That has been used about other people, but if he thought he was right about something, he was unbending. He wasn't going to take any backtalk.

Catherine could stand up to almost anybody, but when Bill got going on one of these things she would sort of tiptoe out of the room and just get away from it all. She was awfully good with--I remember one little incident there near the Grand Coulee Dam when we were looking at these homesteaded farms, in which the farmer got the land free, so to speak. Nothing further was he provided with. He had to improve it, so he had to show at least he was going to build a house on it. But he tried to get loans from

banks and so forth, and they probably could get a bit of a loan, enough to build a basement first.

In that climate, you have to go down below grade to get below the frost line. So the basement then went as far below as maybe six feet or something. You didn't go any deeper than that, so you wouldn't have to dig anymore, and you went up a couple of more feet above that, so you could have some little windows right at the ground level. Then you put a roof over that. We kept seeing these places. This is where the family had been living, some of them for several years. Between breaking the land in and fencing as necessary and getting this much of the thing built, they were pretty well preoccupied and unable to get any more money to build the rest of the house. We saw very few finished houses.

Catherine was getting absolutely incensed about this. Here is the government spending millions on the dam, but no real financial help for the farmer who is supposed to benefit from it. Finally he loses the farm, and it goes back to the bank or wherever, and the next one comes in to take it over, with the land broken in, fenced and so forth, and with quite a good start on the house, you see, and they finish it. So it's usually--they're already the second person who has occupied this land.

We had a young man from the Reclamation Bureau, I guess. Necktie, the whole business, you see. Young, probably attorney type, or whatever, just out of school, showing us around.

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DeMars: His response was, "Well, this has always been the American way. It shows the real stuff of which Americans are made, that they can do this. When they succeed, it really shows their moral fiber," and something of the sort. And Catherine was saying, "Well, young man, it didn't take much moral fiber for your job, did it? You've got your snout in the trough. What do you think about the rest of this?" I mean, she would talk in that way [laughing]. She was just incensed about this afterwards.

And actually, Farm Security in other parts of the country, and they must have been starting to do it there too, but this had mostly been in the East and maybe the Midwest, did have ways of--well, not so much that they had direct funding. They had these county agents who would come in to a farmer who was about to lose everything. They would make an analysis of what his problem was. Maybe if the house was in a terrible condition, they might be able to get funding to build a house.

In other cases, where the farmer would be deeply in debt, let us say, the agent would go around and actually advise them like in bankruptcy, or whatever, help them scale down their debts, and so forth. "We'll make some loans to get him through the next season, and we've straightened out his farm plan, because he was not doing this very efficiently, and the family was ill."

They'd straighten the whole thing out, and put them back on their feet, and everyone would agree that this was worth a gamble, because they'd get something out of it anyway. That was the main thing that the Farm Security was doing elsewhere in the country. But the unique thing in California, of course, was the migrant problem, and this other thing wasn't quite the same. Because, well, the family farm in California had almost disappeared, the small family farm that could work with the seasons and so on.

I think that Catherine's response from that trip was simply that she felt more than ever that it was the legitimate role for government to be involved in more of the welfare of the people than it had been.

Riess: There is a bust of her in the College of Environmental Design library, and she looks rather delicate.

DeMars: She had a kind of slightly mannish swing to her.

I knew her sister very well, later, Betty Mock, who married an architect too. It runs in the family. Betty and Mrs. Bauer lived in Princeton. The family I guess came from Princeton. During my war years, I spent eight weeks being given my so-called indoctrination as a navy officer candidate at Princeton. They lived two blocks away from the campus, and so I saw a good deal of Betty. On weekends we'd take a bicycle and ride out into the countryside, and so forth.

Betty Mock was, for a long time, in the architectural department in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And she was probably the reason that--and I'll show you that momentarily, a little booklet that the museum put out called "What is Modern Architecture?"--they showed Chandler and Yuba City as their examples of modern architecture, among other things.⁹

Riess: You were saying Catherine was a little tough.

⁹"Built in U.S.A., 1932-1944," edited by Elizabeth Mock, Museum of Modern Art.

DeMars: She was a little tough. She was respected by men because she could talk them down. She didn't take no nonsense. [laughs]

Riess: She didn't operate as a woman, then, in a man's world so much.

DeMars: I would say that might be accurate almost to say. But also, I think being a woman, she could sort of get away with some things that guys wouldn't accept from another guy, I guess.

Riess: What would be considered fighting words, if it were from another man.

DeMars: I think so. Yes. I would put it that way. She was awfully good with a large group; she spoke before the Commonwealth Club, at one point, and she really told them what was what, and didn't need to use a microphone, either. She could always be heard. She would stand up in a conference, or something--. She was already being considered a person of some stature.

Her thesis, I think, at Radcliffe was on housing, and then I think the book came out of that. Then, she was on the staff of Senator [Robert F.] Wagner, and probably she was responsible for the Wagner-Steagall Act, which set up the United States Housing Authority to act as banker to local public agencies in promoting low-rent apartments.

Riess: Was she an unlikely match with Bill Wurster, would you say?

DeMars: No, I think it was great. Intellectually, and I would say that she brought a lot of social consciousness to Bill, whom I think had a good heart, but had not had the problem thrown at him before. He was doing things for the rather well-to-do of San Francisco. He was an architect almost exclusively of residences and such. I think that Catherine gave him religion, and then when he got it, why he was a pretty good torch-bearer for the whole subject. I think he was very proud of Catherine.

Then along came little Sadie. Catherine and Bill had bought a little house off Brattle Street, on Farwell Place in Cambridge. At the end of the street, a little dead-end street, you walked through the back of the Trinity Church, I think, where during the revolution either Washington or the British stored their horses. It really dates from that period. These houses along the street were little double houses. So they bought a double house and knocked the space through between, so that what had been the kitchen of each house, which would have been a big kitchen in those days, with a little parlor in front--that became the living and dining room. Then they had a nice little garden. It was very

convenient, and he would walk to MIT. This was just a couple of blocks off Harvard Yard.

They were going to be out of town for a few days on one of the periods when I was up there for two or three days, and suggested that instead of staying in a hotel in Boston I just stay at the house. There was a black lady that they had as a housekeeper, Thelma Redd. I don't know where they first got her--pardon the expression. Thelma was to get my dinner, and so forth. It was a warm summer night, and she had me sit out in the garden. Obviously, she was making dinner for us both, but she was going to eat hers in the house, or something. I said, "Well, Thelma, why don't you have dinner with me out here?" It wasn't that this was the first time we'd ever gotten together. We were quite friendly.

Little Sadie was there. She was a toddler at that time. She had a little Chinese dressing gown. I remember Thelma brought her out before she put her to bed. It was very cute. So there was a nice little household going there. Thelma ran things, made their lives possible, because I don't think that Catherine had much time for being a housewife. Although, let's see, when I first went up there, they were living in Boston. That was before Sadie came along, I guess. So this would have been when I was at the National Housing Agency, before the navy and Puerto Rico. I must have gone up and visited them and had dinner with them. That was one of the occasions when there was this little contretemps. Catherine went--just leaving the scene was the best way to calm the thing down. But she had cooked the dinner, so I guess she knew how. [laughter] Later, Thelma came on west with them, ran the household, raised Sadie, and saw things through to the very end.

European Tour

DeMars: We wanted to see what was going on in Europe. Both Art Steiner and I had been involved in housing design long enough. We had done the Chandler project, though I think Art wasn't involved in that one, he came in a little bit afterward. But Chandler had been done, built. I had some photos of it with me. I'd never been to England, I hadn't been to Europe at all. So the excitement of the first trip and all this was terrific.

We took a bus across the country. We were doing this on kind of a shoestring. I think we were gone about six months, and my recollection is the whole thing cost us \$600. We stayed in youth

hostels and cheap hotels. We had a trip laid out where we thought we'd pick up modern housing and so forth, besides seeing places I wanted to see, and Art was anxious to see too. We were to land in England, go to Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Holland, Germany, Austria, Budapest, Vienna, back to Switzerland, down into Italy, Rome. We got as far as Naples, and I know we went to San Gimignano, so we got to see some of the hill country. To Venice, and then Milan, and Paris, I think. This was all laid out. I think we must have left from Paris.

Riess: Why did you go to Latvia?

DeMars: Because from Finland that's the way you get down into Germany, you see.

Riess: It wasn't that you were looking at something.

DeMars: No, not really. We just landed there, and came on down.

Riess: Did you have names of architects to look up?

DeMars: Only from our own knowledge of them, magazines and so forth. We knew the work of [W.M.] Dudok from Catherine's book on housing. And in fact, I guess that's actually what we were using. From her book we probably made a list. And from Mumford, between them.

Riess: Wurster I believe knew Alvar Aalto. Did he send you to him?

DeMars: No, because I think his trip was almost the identical year. [Wurster went in 1937, with Thomas D. Church and his wife Betsy.]¹⁰

Did I give you a copy of my Aalto piece?

Riess: Yes. [See Appendices]

DeMars: I remember I mentioned going on the Nieuw Amsterdam, which was on its maiden voyage, and the excitement of it. Here was a piece of their architecture right here, and we're on it, as we are crossing the sea. It was beautifully done, even things like the hardware. The hinges would be different than what we got out of a catalogue here, you see, the latches. This was all fascinating. This was all European stuff.

¹⁰See interview with Elizabeth Roberts Church in Thomas Dolliver Church, Landscape Architect, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1978.

I guess I really expected trees to have different shapes, and the grass would be--I didn't really realize that there would be some of the identical pieces of natural landscape. This other hemisphere thing, I don't think I ever articulated that, but I know it was in the back of my mind that I did expect to find the very texture would be different.

Riess: What were the highest high points on that Europe trip?

DeMars: Well, landing in England, of course, I was excited to see Westminster Abbey and things of this sort. We did want to see some of the garden cities. That had some bearing on the things we'd been doing--housing and planning. We were not too, you might say, purist about this. We knew these were done earlier in the century, and they didn't know about "modern" housing then. Still it all looked pretty good for what they had done. But we were wondering when modernism was going to hit England. We didn't see much of it. Although I do think we saw on that trip the Highpoint flats by [Berthold] Lubetkin. And also there was the building that [Eric] Mendelsohn and [Serge] Chermayeff had done. [De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill, Sussex].

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DeMars: And I think we were already aware of the Architectural Review, the British magazine which through the years has been one of the best architectural magazines, I think, and still is. They've got their pulse on the avant-garde, and their columnists and critiques were very capable. One of them, who just died recently--he's been here, and he taught at Santa Cruz, Reyner Banham, quite an honored and respected writer--I think he was the one who wrote an article praising Los Angeles, "the city of the future," and so forth.

Riess: One of your main agendas in 1938 was this search for evidence of modernism. How did you define modernism?

DeMars: Finding the International Style going on someplace. I had seen some examples in New York and other places, just the kind of stripped down, minimalism sort of thing. I think that I was familiar with some of Corbusier's proposals, which I thought were overly minimum at that time, from pictures. Some of his houses didn't appeal to me particularly, but on this trip we did see some of his major works, and I got really quite charged by it. At first, there was a purism, nothing but absolutely "less is more," the Miesian kind of thing. And usually in concrete or rock or whatever they were using, stripped down to essentials, but modeled, sculpturally modeled. And I imagine these early projects had some of our early problems in Farm Security, that they didn't

have much money to do them with--a house for your brother-in-law, or something.

What interested us in the Lubetkin flats--. It's a highrise of eight stories, and a rather interesting sort of form. It isn't just a great slab. At the entrance there's a kind of porte-cochere, a great lid that comes out. Logic--this is the explanation that they gave in the Architectural Review--would have been to have a pipe column, just a post holding it up. It could have been just four inches in diameter, that's all it would have taken. They felt that somehow that made it look like nothing was holding it up, so they thought a piece of sculpture, by being sculptural, could have more dimension, and you wouldn't expect it to be only as big as it took to hold up the lid. They considered all kinds of sculpture. They thought nothing in modern sculpture so far--.

Riess: So are we talking about something like a caryatid holding it up?

DeMars: Yes. Do you know about this?

Riess: No.

DeMars: But that's what they did! A casting of one of the caryatids from the Acropolis. There's just one, and I don't know what holds up the other column. They felt that until modern art had joined rationalism with modern architecture, I guess you'd say, that they would wait for something worthy to hold up the porch on their building. Up to that time, they thought nothing was as worthy as one of the caryatids.

Riess: I was just guessing. But it's such a wildly modern notion, the kind of thing that architects would do today. It's very playful.

DeMars: Yes, exactly. But they had a kind of serious playfulness. And then the furnishings in his apartment, one of the penthouse apartments, the settee and two chairs were made, not the dimensions of my tokonoma post there, but smaller, and it was all made of nice stripped logs, with the knots showing, about three inches through, sort of mortise and tenon together. And then the upholstery was sort of--is it a Jersey cow that would be red and white?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: And so that was the upholstery on this. And on the floor they had a North African rug.

Riess: It must have been exciting.

DeMars: Oh, it was. And we thought, so, modern architecture doesn't just have to be stripped to the bones because you can't afford any more, or can't do any better.

By '38, we'd seen the Breuer chair. And I think the Bauhaus would have been horrified by this apartment. According to them, not only the building style, but everything traditional had to be thrown out, like the baby along with the bath water. In a sense, they felt it was their mission to explore the alternatives, with sculpture and painting and everything. "Where could it lead you if you didn't lean at all on past styles, forms, or anything?"

Riess: Was it also that it had to be machine-made?

DeMars: Well, a painting didn't have to be machine-made, but they might have painted it as though it had been made by a machine. But you know, Moholy-Nagy, or Mondrian, would have been of that school.

Then in Holland we began to see--well, things we didn't see in England, other than these few examples. We saw Dudok's work in Hilversum, which is really a new town, again of the garden city type, the city hall very much inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. In Rotterdam, we saw a very interesting apartment house, I'm sure that it was bombed during the war, bombed out. It's included in this book of Roth's that we'll get to by the time we get to Switzerland.

Could we have a little cup of coffee? And then I'll race through the other countries and things. I think I can do it all--let me get my watch out and that will help.

[Interruption]

DeMars: Someplace in my belongings I have a couple of the original copies of Focus, the British magazine of the M.A.R.S. group, Modern Architectural Research Society.

And we visited the school in Bedford Square--do you know it? The AA [Architectural Association]? They had three of the townhouses on the square joined together by knocking doors through the party walls. Apparently the students themselves put this together, and then they hired professors to make up the school. I think that's the way it got started. And they had just gotten through being able to fire their entire faculty, or something like this. We thought that was very interesting! The faculty had a nice--I think the middle house would have been the entrance, and the parlor was a kind of a faculty lounge, for faculty and

students, and we had a sherry there. It was all very civilized and to be admired.

Riess: You emphasize the importance of publications. It would be sufficient to see a building in publication to begin to be influenced?

DeMars: Oh, yes. And in fact, in some ways the publications are a little dangerous, because at a period like this, it's the most avant-garde, far-out stuff that they just can't wait to be the first to get into print. Several magazines, they've got to be the first one to show it, and so on.

The students are following this very closely. They could do well to catch up, you might say, on what's led up to this. It's a little hard to not have them trying to outrun the--if someone does something a little goofy, they're going to do it a little goofier, but not know quite why. Of course they say, "Well, we know damn well why we're doing it." Or, "If you can't understand it, we can't explain it to you." This kind of thing.

I think it's a little more dangerous right now. It has been so all the way along to an extent, but right now if you're published and do a lot of writing yourself, I think there's a whole bunch in New York that, from what they do, I can't see that it's that important, except that they were either the first to do it, or no one else is doing it, or they've written about how well they do it. Did you see the [Robert] Stern thing on telly? Yes. That had some of that. Some of the guys he picked to include--.

Riess: Like the house that was upside down, for instance?

DeMars: Yes. And so on. Well, okay, these are sort of three-dimensional jokes, in a way, aren't they? Or editorial cartoons. Except that they're rather costly, and so if you can afford to be a party to that, and to subsidize it, okay, I guess. But I don't know whether the students have enough background to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff. And, of course, they might be led into it by their professors and so on.

Riess: But a building in Holland could be influenced by a publication on Frank Lloyd Wright, and worker housing in California is influenced by publications on Corbusier.

DeMars: Yes, but I think more by the philosophy of functionalism. And functionalism on the West Coast, where you're building some frame houses, Bill Wurster saw as being just stripping off unnecessary moldings and whatever, and doing it in as direct a way as possible. Much of his early work doesn't appear to be trying to

be International Style, or Corbusier, or anything. I think a few of them along the way--now remember, he had a number of people working for him who might have been filled with this, and they work on a plan and so forth--they might have tried this out, and Bill said, "Well, okay."

Riess: But I was thinking about you up in Yuba City.

DeMars: Well, I was pretty filled up with how did Corbu go about certain things. Yuba City was really, I would say, our opportunity to do something that he wasn't able to build. He had in one of his books a proposal for "The Farm House," you see, and then "The Cooperative Farm." Well, both of these were things we were doing. I knew that Corbu's hadn't been built.

So what were the elements that he was proposing, either in an aesthetic way or layout, that didn't run counter to what we were doing, but were supportive of it? Supposing he were given this job, what would he do? He might have done this thing we did at Yuba City, I thought. And I went quite far in getting a sheet of asbestos to sheath the upper story, and so on.

Then we went to Denmark, and Tivoli Gardens. That delighted me, absolutely, I was just entranced by it. Do you know it?

Riess: I have not been there.

DeMars: The thing that impressed me about it was it would be as though you took any one of those blocks adjacent to Union Square, and instead of being filled with downtown buildings, made it a park. Now, it's twenty acres, so it would take about four blocks, an area about that big. But the main square is right next to it, and the railroad station is across the street. That's the central railroad station, with the hotels and everything around there. This thing, it closes up at midnight, but you've been to the theatre or to a restaurant, "What will we do? Let's go see what's happening in Tivoli." In those days it cost the equivalent of twenty-five cents to get in. I was in there on this last trip, because I wasn't going to leave without going back to Tivoli again and I think it may be the equivalent of a dollar, now. But not five dollars.

I was delighted by the Victorian aura that it had, actual things from the Victorian period. And then there were many new things which were really advanced--the modern hand was on it, but done with great restraint and care. Minor things were done with great imagination. But here it was, almost a total Victorian kind of thing, with imitation Turkish mosque, all outlined in little lights. And fountains and all this, and the music, an outdoor

theater, a band pavilion, and the city's main concert hall. There were little restaurants everywhere, and beer parlors. There was a kind of amusement zone, with a stand where you could throw balls at shelves full of Royal Copenhagen dishes (rejects). It even had a genuine flea circus--the world's last, I learned later.

Then we got to Sweden, and there were the leftovers of this exposition from 1925, which was one of the earliest explorations of versions of modern architecture of the time. There was one central pavilion that had parabolic arches that went up, and then the roofs--you'd call the whole thing kind of stacked clerestories. It went up in this parabolic shape, you see. Just visualize the arch in St. Louis, but this was maybe only sixty feet high. And then there'd be a little roof coming out about every six or eight feet up, and then glass on the sides, so it stepped up like this, you could see the outside.

Well, that was a shape that hadn't been done too often before, and quite interesting. But since this was designed all at once, the plan was rather formal and axial, etc. So Tivoli, I wouldn't say it just grew, but well it did almost. Tivoli dates from the 1840s. It was built outside the walls, because at that time the city was still walled. If they had a battle there had to be open land beyond, because they didn't want a village or a whole bunch of buildings where you could sneak up and then shoot your way into the city. There had to be this great spread of plain. You could have farms and things in there, dotted around, but you couldn't have any cluster of things. These buildings at Tivoli initially had been made so they could be burned down in case of a battle or a siege. They had to be tents and wood-frame construction, and all that sort of thing.

Also, at Tivoli they were following the actual existing ramparts of the city. It wasn't an axial form laid out on a drawing-board. Instead, the trees followed the shapes of the zig-zags of the Vauban fortification. There is a lake still there that was one of the pieces of the moat. Rather flattish, all of this, but it gave a bit of topography to the place which otherwise is pretty flat. And the trees followed the shape of the moat, and all these pieces--it was informality, and up to that time one would have thought, if you're laying out anything new, there's got to be a certain kind of formality about it.

Art and I talked a lot about this. Everything we liked about Tivoli was missing at the Swedish place, and although there were interesting things, it all had a certain kind of static quality; it wasn't nearly as interesting as the freedom of Tivoli.

When we went to Finland and saw Aalto's buildings, we got really hooked further. All of his things had a rationality to them, they weren't whims. A little whimsy had worked in, but there was always a kind of rational explanation. He wasn't a slave to the International Style, as such. I think he was both using their idiom and his own version of International Style rationality. I didn't quite know at that time that he'd actually attended some of the CIAM events, and so forth. His Finnish Pavilion from the Paris fair is included in Roth's book.

Riess: Which book was this?

DeMars: The New Architecture, Neue Architektur. We have just a few minutes left, I'll see if we can't race through the rest of the countries.

Riess: Did you meet Aalto on that trip?

DeMars: No. He was away. This was '38. He was over here managing, I think, his building for the 1939 Fair in New York. We visited his house, tried to call on him, and he was away, but they told us where to go, what to see, and how to get there and so forth. We went to the Paimio Sanatorium--you can refer back to my little piece on Aalto, because I do go through more or less what we had seen.

We tried to get into Leningrad, and it took visas and we weren't able to do it. But we saw the Vipuri Library, which is now inside of Russia, you see. It was badly damaged during the war, but I'm told that the Russians have rebuilt it.

In Finland, Aalto wasn't the only one. There were other architects; there was Erik Bryggman. We went into this restaurant in Turku, and were so entranced by everything we saw. "Who was the architect?" Well, it was Bryggman. Typically we called up the architect whose work we admired in places, if we hadn't heard of him yet. And Bryggman was very cordial. His English was not very good, and my French was just equal to his, so we managed to communicate. He gave us a tour, showed us Aalto's work, and then some buildings he'd done, and so on. Apparently, the two of them were very close and thought very much alike. That also pleased us very much.

I still cannot quite figure out why the Finns in general have been so much in the avant-garde of both art and architecture. They seemed on that trip, and they continue to be, so far ahead of the rest of their world. The Bauhaus was rather dogmatic in the way other architects used it, but there seemed to be more sort of separate originalities in Finland. They knew all about what was

going on in the rest of the world, but then they were doing their thing, which was a bit different.

In Germany we wanted to see the big housing developments on the outskirts of Berlin, the ones that Mumford mentions.

Riess: How was Germany then? A little creepy?

DeMars: Well, of course we didn't know a war was coming on. But it was creepy, the Nazi business. I think we were in Munich on one of the big occasions. We weren't reading the papers, and besides my German was very limited, just enough to get by on, more or less.

Riess: Some big rally?

DeMars: The big rally in that great stadium in Munich. I would like to have seen it, but somehow or other we were looking for other things. We went to the Hofbrauhaus and had some meals there, even drank some beers with some young Nazis in uniforms, in fact even pushing each other around a little when we left--we were going someplace else, but I swear that Art jokingly shoved one of them a little.

V TELESIS--AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK KENT AND VERNON DEMARS

[Interview 5: January 26, 1989]##

The Lunch Seminars

Riess: At that very first meeting of the group that became Telesis, on August 23, 1939, what it says in Fran Violich's minutes is that you met at Garrett Eckbo's and you read Gutheim's letter. Now, who's Gutheim?

DeMars: [Frederick] Gutheim is, I'd say, a protege of Lewis Mumford's. He's not an architect, but a writer, a teacher, and an activist on causes such as historical architectural preservation. He's written reviews and articles on architectural subjects in the magazines, and one of the first books on Aalto and his work. There was a time in which a series of books were commissioned on the story of great rivers of the country, and he was assigned to do the Potomac, because he was born in Washington, D.C., and knew the area and all that. I don't know when I first met him, but apparently both Fran and I knew him well. He was a friend of Catherine's too. Of course, she and Mumford were close. [i.e. "very" V. DeM.]

Riess: Why would his letter be read?

DeMars: Well, because Fran Violich saw him, probably in Washington, and told him about this idea. And then Gutheim said, "Go for it," or something of the sort.

Riess: I wonder, does that mean that there was a group like it in Washington?

DeMars: No. It's just that Gutheim had a sharp mind, a quick "read." Although he was about our same age, I think Fran and I were always somewhat in awe of his ability to listen and quickly analyze a situation.

Riess: Fran Violich has said of the F.S.A. group, "Every lunch would be a seminar. We were planning the whole new world. We were kicking around the ideas in a chapter of Mumford as conceptual material for designing a labor camp in Marysville." What time is he talking about?

DeMars: Marysville is Yuba City, the project name since it's closer to Yuba City than her twin, Marysville. He's referring to a time before I got back from Europe, because when I got back the camp had already been laid out, but not yet built.

When I got back, I was full of my European experience. We were talking about housing and things of this sort, and how little of it had happened here. This would have been certainly when I was first talking about the experience of the various groups I had learned about abroad, branches of CIAM [Congress International d'Architecture Moderne].

I was most impressed by the fact that this group in Zurich, by simply getting together, threw the old--what is that expression? When you get rid of the old deadwood?--the older generation of architects that were getting all the jobs and things? This was a group called the Friends of Modern Architecture. They had different names in different countries. I don't think at that time it occurred to me that this was CIAM, really a part of that, but it obviously was. They just simply said that this group of younger architects were able to raise the question of a new way of looking at things.

Riess: How did you get in touch with them?

DeMars: This was that accident, purely, of meeting Jack Kent while we were visiting an architect that had been recommended to us. This is one of these circumstantial things.

Riess: If Fran was talking about every lunch being a seminar, that means it must have been at some period of time when the two of you overlapped.

DeMars: Yes. I must have been in on maybe some of those lunches.

Riess: The official beginning to the Telesis meetings is August 23, 1939.

DeMars: But we were talking about it before that, apparently, for a long time, and wondering what to do about it.

Riess: I am interested in the point where you decide to get off the dime, or whatever--let's find a nicer expression.

DeMars: Yes, rather than "butts." [laughing] Butts doesn't come until later. That's Milton Butts, who was this third landscaper, or the fourth. No, Garrett was in at the very end, and I don't think the two--Butts and he--were there at the same time. We couldn't afford more than one landscape architect, and maybe a draftsman. When Garrett was doing it he was both, and he did it very well.

Riess: Well, when Violich refers to the lunch seminars, he says that it was with Burt Cairns, so at least that puts it before he died, and that was December 1939. He also says that lunch would be Cairns, you, Mocine, and Jaffe.

DeMars: He mentioned me? And Jaffe, Ruth Jaffe.

Riess: Ruth Jaffe was a landscape architect, but she was not in Telesis, was she?

DeMars: No, and she didn't work for us, the Farm Security, that I recall.

Riess: Do you remember sitting at lunches with Ruth Jaffe?

DeMars: I don't, quite. But it may have been that she would come in from wherever it was she was working, and join us for lunch, and talk about it further. Of course, this wasn't my sole thrust when I got back from Europe. I probably said, "Well, why don't we do this?" But then there were fascinating things going on in Farm Security, and that was kind of a full-time affair. Again, there were some pretty exciting projects that we were working on.

Fran ought to be able to tell us when he left the scene, and for how long we had these luncheons and talks. I know we went on--in fact, I think it's mentioned someplace in here--Burt Cairns and I, I remember sitting down for a couple of days to work out the budget for the coming year, "This many projects, and cross this one out," and it amounted to a couple of million dollars, I think. And then, we were going to go out to lunch at the Fly Trap, I think it was. Do you know this?

Riess: No.

DeMars: It was an old 19th century building, and we thought it made a great restaurant. But to have a name like the Fly Trap-- [laughter]. This was over on Sutter--great big arches on the outside of the window, facing north. This was when we were on Second Street, you see, in the Wells Fargo Building, and we could walk across Market and then go over here, and it was kind of cheap. It was a kind of businessman's place like Sam's and some of these others, though not quite the same. We thought it would make a great sort of sidewalk cafe, and so of course they just

tore it down. Probably have got a skyscraper there now! It was only one story above the street, a big high dining space, and then one story next. Two stories couldn't last in that area.

But this particular time we had just gotten through, rather late, finally sewing up this couple of million dollars for the season, and Burt said, "My gosh, can you lend me fifty cents for lunch?" [laughter]

The Two Generations of Telesis [Jack Kent arrives]

Kent: There were two age groups in Telesis that emerged quickly, each with different backgrounds, because of the four, five, six, seven-year difference in time, and what was happening in the Bay Area, California, the USA, the world. Mumford's book didn't come out until '38, The Culture of Cities. And then all of a sudden, as it shows in that list of names there, half of the people at that meeting are from the younger generation. That surprised me. That was December of '39. I remember, of course, four years with most of these people.

DeMars: I remember a meeting in which several of us met with a group at Berkeley, and one of the things that I remember was after discussing all these things, one of them said, "Gee, we didn't think you old guys were thinking this way!" Now, would you have been at that meeting?

Kent: No, I don't think I was.

DeMars: The younger generation, when you got back from Europe, were already part of the group?

Kent: Before we left college, we were in rebellion. But we weren't in the group until Fran and I happened to meet by chance at the Tolmans' house. The Tolmans invited Fran for a big cocktail party because Deborah, the oldest daughter, was at home from Radcliffe, and Fran had met Deborah and Florence Erskine, Dorothy Erskine's daughter. They were at Radcliffe, and he was at Harvard. So, they stayed in touch, as Bay Area people do in their condition. They got back, and I was invited because I was an Inverness friend, and Mary and I were sort of sparking--Mary Tolman, the younger Tolman.

DeMars: That would have been your first meeting with Fran.

Kent: Absolutely. And that must have been before Deborah went back to school, so it must have been--well, I came home in September, it must have been right in there, 1939.

DeMars: So this is after you got back from Europe.

Kent: Yes. We have to go back to '38. I'm just saying that what happened was that--all this probably ought to get down--from the point of view of the generation that I was with, and generations were small, four-year generations, college generations, we began to sort of be our own teachers without knowing it by the time we were at the end of the sophomore year, and we were in rebellion blindly, stupidly, against poor Warren Perry and Stafford Jory. We didn't love to do the things that you guys loved to do.

Riess: That's a fairly provocative remark!

DeMars: The Beaux Arts rendering and all that.

Kent: I'm not saying we were awake, or better; we were just crazy, and reacting.

DeMars: Yes. But our attitude was a bit of rebellion also, just against the faculty, even to do the sort of things that they were getting us to do. I wanted to do my own version of the Palace of Charles V on a mountaintop, or something. And I've discovered this in students later on, too.

Kent: And those years were when?

DeMars: Actually '26 to '31.

Kent: John Galen Howard was there when you were there?

DeMars: Howard was there, and he was my professor. That is, he was there, but he wasn't doing much teaching. When you were there--

Kent: I came in '34.

DeMars: In '34, well, he had died.

Kent: He had resigned before that.

DeMars: Quite a bit before, but he died shortly after this class that I had with him.

Were you people working yet?

- Kent: Yes, we all were employed. We were not unemployed, which surprises everybody. Because my father's generation--that's a story too that has to get in at some point. He used to hear from his friends--he was an architect--"Oh, that Telesis, they're just a bunch of bright guys who are out of work."
- DeMars: Well, that was kind of true at one time.
- Kent: It was never true in my generation.
- DeMars: No, but it was more true in ours. But actually, it's not quite true either. Fran and all of us were in Farm Security. That is, we were in Farm Security from '35.
- Kent: Walter Landor was the only guy that was unemployed [laughter] that I seem to remember. Fran learned that, and we put him to work.
- Riess: When you met Fran, then, in September 1939, was he talking about this group?
- Kent: Yes, he was. I don't know whether it was talk about the group or not, but we vibrated about Bay Area landscape architecture. And then we met by chance within three or four weeks at the Key System Terminal in San Francisco, purely by chance. And that's when he said, "Say, we're having this group," and he invited me to a meeting in October, something like that. That meeting that I was invited to was at Murchio's on Telegraph Hill. Remember that?
- Riess: Murchio's is a restaurant?
- Kent: No, one of Fran's buddies, Jack Murchio. He's still alive and well. He's not an architect or designer, but a friendly spirit.
- Riess: I know you had some meetings at the New Columbus Restaurant, and I wondered whether it was a restaurant-meeting group, or whether you went to people's houses.
- Kent: Both. Also the Grotto, where the waiter could balance a tumbler, glass of wine on his head. He'd just put that on his head, and fill up his arms and walk around and serve the place, and then serve the wine.

Kent's Background, and Undergraduate Years, UC Class of 1938

- Riess: A bit of background from you, Mr. Kent. Your degree was in architecture. What was your attitude towards landscape architects and planners? Where did they fit in?

Kent: My dad was a self-made architect, as his generation was after the earthquake. He was seventeen, in high school and there were a group of them that wanted to become architects and help rebuild the city. They ended up with three guys, Weihe, Frick, and Kruse, who were in Arthur Brown's office, starting right then. And they did major things in city and federal building, and all kinds of big buildings, Cowell Hospital, Sproul Hall. The Brown office functioned for about forty, fifty years.

I was aware, just in the background, of [Frederick Law] Olmsted, the first, and his role in the city and Golden Gate Park, the studies that led to that, and the campus. And I was also aware of Olmsted's role in the Chicago World's Fair, where the architects just didn't bring him in to do the little bush at all, it was a big, joint scheme. And I was aware of Burnham, the Burnham Plan. Our neighbor, Mr. Taylor of Taylor & Taylor Printers, had stacks of the Burnham Plan that survived.

DeMars: Now, Burnham was an architect.

Kent: But Burnham and Olmsted were absolutely co-equal in the Chicago thing. And then the city planning thing, for me, that was a fantasy until Mumford's book came out. It was a demeaned activity in the minds of my father's generation of architects, because the people who went into city planning were architects who didn't make it as architects. Jorgenson, who was the secretary of the San Francisco City Planning Commission, who he knew, was the first guy I went to see when I came back in '39 and wanted to go right into city hall, you know. And Gutterson, too--Gutterson's another wonderful architect, San Francisco and Berkeley, a friend of my father's.

DeMars: Yes, I knew him very well.

Kent: He helped us, when we came back to Berkeley in '48, to organize the Berkeley Planning and Housing Association, to sort of support the city government waking up and doing things. He was very respectful of both city planning as a professional field, and landscape architecture. So I think, at least for my generation certainly, landscape architecture was thought of as a profession, and it was big-time.

DeMars: Probably more so than city planning.

Kent: City planning didn't exist. It came into being, in my mind, in Mumford's book. Plus the fact that Burnham and those guys and Olmsted did city plans themselves, both Olmsteds, from 1860 on.

But I didn't really know that, except through Mumford right off the bat.

Riess: Perhaps their planning didn't have people in mind so much as schemes, and maybe Mumford was more people?

Kent: No, I think they, and certainly Olmsted, grew out of the slum housing and Jacob Riis's, "the lousy cities, let's do better." And they did a lot better; they did major things. And Catherine [Bauer]. Although Catherine came in 1938 for a one-year appointment as a visiting professor in the social welfare department, she stayed on for another year of teaching. Mary took a course with her. It was fascinating, because she was--.

I got to know her because I'd met Mumford, and Mumford said, "Get to know Catherine," when I came back in '39. Bingo! But there was a whole new dimension to city planning, architecture, landscape architecture, the whole thing, because she was saying, we have to find a way to overcome this weird trip in our society that just ruins everything for the poor people in the cities. And then, within a short time, she said, "My God, we did the wrong thing!" [chuckles] Housing projects, and federal programs with heavy-duty regulations, and that kind of thing.

Riess: Was the Department of Social Welfare at Berkeley a particularly enlightened place?

Kent: I don't know the full story, except it had just been organized fairly recently [1939]. The first dean--[Harry M.] Cassidy was his name, I think? [Under Cassidy, in 1944 a graduate professional School of Social Welfare was begun.]

I think a San Francisco foundation had given a chunk of money for Catherine's appointment, Gerbode, or something.

DeMars: Whose idea was it to bring Catherine out?

Kent: I don't know.

DeMars: And what were her contacts here?

Kent: I don't know.

DeMars: It wasn't yours.

Kent: Oh, no. I had nothing to do with that, and our class didn't, either.

Riess: Vernon and I were talking about what Fran refers to as lunch seminars, and I won't get into that too much, but he calls them self-intellectualization experiences. I suppose that happens when you're a student, even if all is going well, but more often when you have something that you're really up against, something that is unsatisfactory. Was Telesis rooted in dissatisfaction about your education?

Kent: No, I don't think that's fair to the architecture faculty. I don't think it was a bad thing that they were doing; it was just what they believed in. Our generation, mainly me and a few others, I guess, for some reason or other by the time we were sophomores, with help from Aram Torossian, who was a faculty member, low on the totem pole over there, but a very influential, delightful person--. For example, he taught the two classes in the first year, shades and shadows and descriptive geometry.

DeMars: That was used as the flunk-out class.

Kent: Yes. And our class went from sixty-two to thirty-two. It was terrible, just terrible.

DeMars: What was terrible?

Kent: That, just that. The cutting down that way. But he had been a draftsman in Arthur Brown's office, I think, in the city. Armenian, sparkly little eyes, and he had a short leg, and he hobbled around. But he was an intellectual, and he read broadly. He also had a course called aesthetics, which I'm not sure everybody had to take. It was an organized lecture course.

Anyway, at the end of the spring semester he quietly passed out reading lists for the summer, suggestions. That was just terrific, from my point of view. And I was not in rebellion until the end of my sophomore year, really. I mean, before that I was straight arrow. But I read those books. I remember From Rameses to Rockefeller, Whitaker, and Frank Lloyd Wright's autobiography, and The Autobiography of an Idea, Louis Sullivan. Those three books, and none of those dealt with big social issues. But they certainly gave you a big sweep.

DeMars: I was just going to say, they were dealing with the fact that there are new methods of construction, there are new materials, and the sense--

Kent: Steel frame buildings, and Prairie Style.

DeMars: --and at some point in time, you can't go on pretending that we are building the same way the Greeks did, with their problem. Or the gothic, or the renaissance.

Kent: Well, the Whitaker book featured, among many other things, Rockefeller Center. Frank Lloyd Wright featured all of his stuff. And Louis Sullivan featured the idea of being functional with structure and need and all that.

And here we were in Berkeley, with Maybeck right up here on the hill, and us living in this area and loving it, and all the watercolor renderings that we did of our things always had Maybeck trees and things in them, regardless of whether the building was starkly modern or something like that.

And Michael Goodman, of course, was a friendly spirit.

DeMars: Now, was he teaching at that time?

Kent: Yes. He was very caustic and hard to understand, but we got along with Michael, and he got along with us.

Riess: Why was he hard to understand? The accent?

Kent: No, his brain, I think. [laughs] Do you know Michael? I'm not sure he's very clear in his thinking, at times. I think I've said that to him many times as a student.

DeMars: He did have a dry wit, a kind of "sit down" comic. I remember, in the '50s in the old Ark, him sitting at a student's desk giving a crit with several other students gathered around when the door opened and in walked three or four strangers, other faculty members, and ignoring Goodman proceeded to pace off the room to look up at the ceiling, etc. Goodman stopped. "Who are these guys?" he said. "Oh, they're the space committee," said a student. And then, like Groucho Marx, flicking the ash from his cigar, "Oh?" says Goodman, "where are their helmets?" [laughter]

Riess: He was provocative?

Kent: Oh, yes, and he was a very gifted guy. He was [Timothy] Pflueger's design man on the 450 Sutter Building. He did all kinds of great decorative things. Many disastrous buildings on his own, I would say. [laughter]

DeMars: He also was a very accomplished artist in watercolor, pastel, and actually professionally--these were coming out. At one point when I first got on the faculty, I would have been fifty, or maybe it was even earlier, he was into wood engraving and had some of them

in the Library of Congress. Splendid. Should have gone on with that.

Kent: Yes. The architecture faculty wasn't in any sense dead and dying or bad and terrible in what they were offering. They just continued to offer what had become routine for them.

DeMars: And they were trying by your time, it seems to me, to begin to make the transition to recognize modern architecture.

Kent: Maybe. Certainly Goodman was. But then they brought in Howard Moise. Now, Moise--has his name been mentioned in all this? He was a very constructive faculty member for our generation. He organized and offered a course on the introduction to city planning, which none of us deigned to take, because we were doing it ourselves. But he did do that, and he was helpful, and he was a bridge between Warren Perry and--

DeMars: Perry and that group brought him in, I think. Because I think they felt themselves lacking.

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Riess: Robert Ratcliff also talked about a rebellious group, and it seemed to me they were concerned that the coursework wasn't sufficiently integrated, you didn't get the engineering.

Kent: Oh, we were just complainers about the establishment. We did have ideas, but we didn't do anything about it. But I think mine individually--it wasn't until the last two years, mainly, that it hit me.

I was a Beta, I was a fraternity boy. I lived just a block and a half away in that beautiful building that's still there on Hearst and LeRoy, where the School of Public Policy is. Never should have been sold. So I was just within walking distance of the Ark. I had a great place to eat and sleep, and friends, buddies. I didn't really start waking up about the world itself, not to mention architecture, until I was about a sophomore, the last part of my sophomore year. In fact, the Big C Parade, you remember, it was every four years? I designed the float for the Betas which won the grand prize, which ridiculed the Jews, and praised Hitler.

DeMars: Oh, for God's sake.

Riess: Are you serious?

Kent: Absolutely. I have pictures of it. And Monroe Deutsch was on the reviewing stand with Sproul, and our float came by on a big truck with a rowboat, and everybody at the oars was a Jew, great big noses--and some of our members were Jews! Ziegler, O'Flaherty--O'Flaherty was in the class behind me. Jim Eddie was the guy who was dressed up like Hitler. He had one of those black mustaches and a brown shirt, big swastika. He'd command the Jews to "row, row, row." Grand prize.

We did this because--it all gets explained this way: the Beta brothers had a man on the crew, Tevis Thompson, Napa Valley, big family, grapes, vineyards. He wanted to go to the Olympic Games, because the Cal Crew always makes it. Resner, as editor of the Daily Cal--Resner was Jewish and I only know because of the way it all came out--he editorialized and the Daily Cal took a position against participation by the University in the '36 games, which were to be in Berlin. Hitler was using it--it was scheduled long before he came to power. And that was a big controversial issue on the campus, between all the Big C Society and the fraternities and the sororities. There was no organized undergraduate student group, such as we've had since the sixties. There was Stiles Hall, and I was in Stiles Hall too, part of my cross-purposes [laughs], but I didn't know at that time that that was going to be the major part of my education, Stiles Hall.

But that just tells you--for the first two years, our class did not rebel.

Architecture Studies

DeMars: Did you find the orders interesting? You must have done the orders.

Kent: We did Stafford Jory's beautiful renderings, yes.

DeMars: Did you enjoy it at all?

Kent: Not so much.

DeMars: You'd say it was irrelevant at the time, was that it?

Kent: I didn't think it was irrelevant; I just didn't think. And Jory--do you know the Jory family?

Riess: No.

Kent: He was a very influential person, but didn't say very much. He was one of John Galen Howard's superb renderers. A designer I'm sure, a first-class designer. He did the campus plan that's in the Campanile, or was in the Campanile. And many things.

DeMars: It's now in Cal[ifornia] Hall.

Kent: His house is right there at Euclid and Rose Steps, on the west side of Euclid. Great, big oak tree, much too big for the house. Beautiful house.

Riess: You asked Jack whether he enjoyed the orders.

DeMars: Well, I meant as a course. As a course, did you enjoy what you were doing? Or did you immediately think, "What's this got to do with architecture?"

Kent: You're right, that's a good question, because at that point, somehow with me and with some of the others, we were--that's a year and a half after we were in school--somehow we were no longer following the instruction and the instructors. We loved painting, and we had lots of good, gifted people, and they could have done it. In fact, I must bring one.

My class had its fiftieth anniversary last November at the Mark, and a guy came up to me who I didn't recognize. Later, I learned his name was Roy Donnelly, a fellow architecture student, because he has a relative up here who knows me. He sent me a copy of one of the things he did in Jory's class. He uses it as an advertisement for what he does now after he's retired from a long career of architecture. He now is right back to doing what he wanted to do, delineation. It's a beautiful thing.

Riess: I guess maybe what you're doing when you're "doing orders" is you're copying, and after a while it doesn't feel right?

Kent: You appreciate, though.

DeMars: Yes, since you put it down, and you draw all these leaves and curves. And it wasn't just copying. For instance, the Ionic thing, you had to lay out the way to make that curve, which is done by a bunch of offsets with compasses and so forth, French curve. And then you cast the shadows. You have to have the plan--you don't just copy the thing out of a book, and just have it in front of you there. We had something to go by as the general thing, but you cast the shadows, and then you knew that the far edge of it would be darker as it got far over, and reflected light hit the thing--remember all that stuff?

Kent: Yes, of course.

DeMars: Well, that was kind of fascinating, a little bit. It wasn't just copying out of the book, like you could get something, blow it up and trace it over, you see. We were supposed to lay out the thing, and--oh, we had examinations, didn't we, in that course? At a midterm it would say--and you wouldn't know which was coming--draw the order from the Temple of Mars Ultor in its proper proportions, you see. All the proportions were segments of the width of the column itself, and it was called a module, wasn't it? An eighth of an M, or half M, this--and you did it without referring to anything. So you had to know how this went, from that.

Riess: Well, it sounds like it could be satisfying. It also sounds like a kind of boot camp.

DeMars: Well, it was, in a way. And I think part of the thing was that under the Beaux Arts system this was considered part of the basic vocabulary that you'd have to use if you were designing buildings. If you were doing the Emporium or something, you had to know where the orders came from, how to lay them out, how you could modify them, and so forth.

Kent: That's Vernon's time. Just ten years later--

DeMars: Yes, but even in the middle of our time, it was like, "What has this got to do with what is going to happen next?"

Kent: And it ended. The end of the sophomore year ended that influence in the generation I was in. There were four courses, fall, spring, fall, spring. And the spring course of the sophomore year was the orders. Composition, and big plates, rendering. And Jory did it. And everybody knew that when you came back in the fall, for the next two years you had all those real architectural problems to deal with, and you could design them your own way. You might get bad grades, but nobody was going to tell you you had to put capitals on your columns, or anything. And that left you sort of completely rootless. Then you'd reach for another set way to do things, which was ugly modern.

DeMars: Yes. And where did you get this? Out of the magazines.

Kent: Yes.

DeMars: There weren't enough examples around to be inspired by, although by that time--.

Kent: Wurster was alive and well, and his things were published.

DeMars: Oh, yes, but they were all rather modest.

Kent: San Francisco townhouses.

DeMars: Yes. We never had a house to design during our whole period. Did you?

Kent: No.

Riess: Where did Gutterson and Maybeck fit into this, then? Particularly Maybeck? He didn't teach.

Kent: They just influenced our sensibilities, living in Berkeley.

Riess: So when you go from the orders to "ugly modern," wasn't there room for the shingle house?

Kent: There was plenty of room to do that, but that wasn't the thing to do. [emphasis] Isn't that crazy? I mean, the architecture magazines--.

DeMars: They didn't give them as problems. You didn't get a small house on a lot, did you?

Kent: No, but we had a music pavilion, or we had an auditorium in a park. Not too big. We found ways to do that other than classical. But it was kind of crazy, you know, because it wasn't the way to work. That rebellion went along with all this other stuff on the campus that was beginning to happen, peace strikes and so on.

Riess: It did?

Kent: Oh, absolutely, for me. Mainly me, in the architecture group.

Riess: And when you talk about "we," you're talking about maybe a subgroup in the architecture group?

Kent: Oh, not really. We weren't that big. You went by classes. And our class, the initial group was maybe sixty people or so, and then quickly went down to about twenty, or something like that. Maybe even smaller. We were aware that there was a big change after that first year. But we were a together class, socially, humanly. There were several women in the class, Mary Kilgore and three or four others. We were kept together through our entire four years.

Syd Williams' parents lived on Keith, just below Euclid, half a block down, on the south side. His father had been a builder in Berkeley, and the Depression knocked him out. He was living in a funny little place that was sliding down the hill; the whole lot was sliding down the hill on that side of Keith. (It still is.) But he and his wife, who was known as Tiny (she was very small), were the hosts of Syd's friends. I mean, two or three times a semester we'd have a Sunday or Saturday lunch or picnic right there in that humble house in a beautiful garden, not designed but wonderful trees.

We also were pulled together in a real way, both in everything we were talking about and things we were designing, by Northgate. The Cow Bell was there. Did you know the Cow Bell?

DeMars: Yes.

Kent: The Cow Bell was the coffee and hamburger place.

DeMars: How about Northgate Inn?

Kent: I don't remember Northgate Inn.

Riess: Is the Cow Bell building still there?

Kent: Oh, yes. None of the buildings have changed on the whole west side.

DeMars: On the east side--you know Howard did the apartment building on the corner. Beautiful. And I think the Northgate Inn was next. It seems to me it was a wood, Maybeckian thing.

Kent: It must have burned down.

DeMars: Maybe so.

Kent: It's now where the Chinese place is, chain grocery.

DeMars: It had rooms, and remember there was also the Varsity Inn. That would have been when you were there, because the Varsity was on Bancroft and Telegraph, right on the corner. There were several places like this where you could live, and a good grill, coffee house thing below. We spent a good deal of time at our time in the Northgate Inn as a place we'd have lunch.

Kent: That was gone by the time we got there. It must have been burned. But then opposite that, and next to the Cow Bell, was the entrance way that goes back there now to La Val's and other things, and that existed. There was a printer, Bentley, who had his printing

presses in there. Our generation, I think before and after, had entree through some way to the Bentley printing place after the Ark closed at night--we worked all night around, to live up to the true tradition [laughs]--so we'd be carrying our big boards across the street, and we did them there.

DeMars: You mean to work the rest of the night?

Kent: Yes.

DeMars: What, they threw you out?

Kent: "Closink!" That came after you guys--that was the custodian. I don't know what his nationality was.

DeMars: Was that a little guy?

Kent: Yes. You must have known him.

DeMars: Wasn't he called the massier? The massier is the guy that took your plates, cut them off the board, mounted them on the chassis.

Kent: No, this was not that guy.

Riess: Did you use the French terminology?

Kent: I think there was a little of it, projets. And the esquisse-esquisse. The sketches.

DeMars: But you don't remember? There was a big frame with manila paper stretched on it, and the massier actually took your drawing.

Kent: He was gone by the time we were there.

DeMars: Were you doing drawings on stretched paper glued to a board?

Kent: Yes.

DeMars: When it was shown, wasn't it on a frame with passepartout around it? Gold tape?

Kent: I don't remember, Vern. I don't think it was done that way.

DeMars: That's what he did, you see. Because the drawings were all wet from the last minute water colorings or india ink washes.

Kent: Did you also explain that we had niggers to help us? Younger students were recruited by older students to help them at the last minute, paint and do things, and get out the final thing, and they

were called niggers. How about that! And that was completely accepted, and there were of course no blacks in the school, but there were Orientals and women.

DeMars: And the notion was, for that assistance you would come and give them free criticism later on, while they were working on their own projects. They would go, in fact almost by preference to the professor, and get the guy that they thought was good, and whom they'd admired. They'd seen his work, and so forth. Say, "Would you give me a critique?" They might do that ahead of time, and then he would be expected to nigger on the next project.

Riess: It's not even like it's academic, this activity of becoming an architect. It's quite--.

Kent: It's medieval. It's the guild, you see.

DeMars: And, of course, the professor comes to you singly, and sits there with you--

Kent: Not a class.

DeMars: --maybe three times a week, you see. Later on, it's gotten to be that they'll gather the whole class together and talk to them about certain kinds of things that they figure they keep repeating themselves. I don't remember that ever happening, particularly. It was always an individual thing, one by one. Even at the present time they go around still the same way and see each student separately, and see what he's doing, and propose this thing for the next time. I would say they made an honest attempt, as you were saying, you did whatever you really wanted to do. They might try to--did you ever get talked out of it at all?

Kent: I don't think so.

DeMars: Wouldn't Jory ever--?

Kent: Well, Jory wasn't involved. Jory finished his influence at the end of the sophomore year, for us. He couldn't stand what was happening in the junior and senior years, I think. So it was Moise.

DeMars: The professor would try to see whether you were trying to do this, and he knows you're not an architect yet, and so forth. So he'd try to find what's good about your idea, help you with that, and steer you away from things that just wouldn't work, or in his opinion were not likely to produce a good design. He'd say, "Well, you just don't do this, because this goes this way, and there's no room to get out this door, and you've got to do that,

and you have to have this--." Wouldn't that be the kind of thing? That he would try to logically get you to make the changes that he thought were needed? And that was called the critique. And that student might do the same thing; he'd come around and say, "Good God, you can't do that." (This would be the graduate student that you admired saying that).

One other thing. We had a course called stereotomy that I think you had to take. It was like one unit, the same thing as doing watercolors. This was the discussion of framing a house, studs and so forth, an arch with voussoirs as the elements of the arch, and how brick would be laid up. And so that was one hour a week. Now, I must say there's some progress, because at the present time students make little models of the frame house, or they're given a particular problem. I think they're much more understanding of structural problems.

I would say that the way the engineering was taught was not integrated with the way you designed, what the architect does. You were just taught a routine series of things, the elements: how a beam bends, or doesn't, and how you calculated steps, and so on.

Kent: Does the name R. E. Davis mean anything to you? Davis was a major figure in the engineering faculty, and he longed to teach the architecture students when they were sophomores or something, so he could just torture them. He was a great engineer who built the Strength of Materials Lab and tested both the Boulder Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Bay Bridge, right there. They had big models, and they were pushing them and pulling them and doing all that. He just would scoff and scorn at these architecture students--fourth-year, fifth-year seniors. He was so mean. And yet he was a very nice man. Twinkle in his eye all the time he was doing it.

DeMars: All the time he was being mean.

Kent: Yes. And so we finally--that pulled us together in a major way, because there were several in our class who weren't afraid of calculus or physics or engineering at all. Syd was one.

DeMars: I wasn't afraid of it; I just couldn't bother with it.

Kent: Oh, there were a lot of people who were afraid of it. A lot of architecture students come with an aesthetic impulse.

DeMars: These were ones that hadn't been knocked out by descriptive geometry.

Kent: Right.

Riess: How did it pull you together?

Kent: That's probably one of the things that got me and a couple of others into being spokespersons, you know. I remember I went to see him, they had student hours, and in a sense I sort of said, "What's your problem, professor?" [laughter]

DeMars: And what did he tell you?

Kent: Well, he just laughed and chuckled. He said, "Well, I'm probably being pretty silly, but I just want to make sure the members of your class wake up and do battle with me on this, and sort of take charge."

Riess: Do you think in any way he had the notion that he was modeling himself on real life?

Kent: Yes, I do.

DeMars: And thinking that architects are just off dreaming and so forth.

Kent: Worse than landscape architects. No question.

DeMars: Yes. John Wells--this is only a slight digression--this is my former partner. He now has an architectural group, a very small group, only six people or so. John was telling me that he's in this firm, the Kennedy Engineers, and there must be maybe a hundred engineers or something. He's the head of their architecture department.

When John went in he was hired by Hunt, formerly of Kitchen and Hunt. Hunt has retired, and John's in charge now. He does work for them, but if he can get work from the outside--and he's gotten quite a number of things from the University, he did the complete remodeling of the dining commons a while back--. But he's saying that they're moving their quarters from where they are now, and they didn't get him to lay it out, they got another engineer or architect to do it.

They still don't think, John says, of the architect as being anything other than helping to pick out the wallpaper and this kind of thing, even though here they are, designing these--. They don't understand the process. John says they start with the rivet, and then that goes into a beam, and then you get some beams in the thing here, and it builds up out of that. They never turn back, they don't see what the end is, says John.

Political Attitudes and Social Concerns

Riess: That's quite a powerful image, isn't it? Starting with the rivet. You have to really think hard about that rivet.

We're doing a good job of setting the scene for a group such as Telesis. But since we've gotten into politics a bit, let me ask, as you come out of school, how would you define yourselves politically? Your older group.

DeMars: I think I've mentioned this before, that I didn't have one social urge from the University, or even from my reading or whatever. I sensed that there was something a little bit strange about it, but I got my religion as I went along in Farm Security, thinking there was something awfully wrong, if one part of the population [was homeless]. I mean, this was not like the homeless and so forth now; here were people who were part of the working force, and living like animals. And the notion of doing anything to correct that just didn't occur, that at least minimum decent housing was a necessary thing. But I didn't come out of school with that, because I just wasn't exposed to it, quite. But that's that generation.

Kent: My generation certainly did get exposed to housing. Well, certainly Howard Moise's presence. He did teach an introductory course in city planning, probably in housing also. The Federal Housing Act was passed in the middle of our time, and I think housing became--I think Torossian probably got us to read Jacob Riis, too, How the Other Half Lives, which was the big slum description, New York City and all that.

We were--I don't know, I obviously can't speak for anybody but myself--but a substantial group of us were what you'd call sort of unorganized left liberals, politically, not understanding how to be active politically, and never thought that we would be active politically. We were concerned with social needs that architects ought to pay attention to. And certainly Mumford influenced that in his book. I had written to Mumford in 1936 as a student, and it must be because of the New Yorker things that he wrote. He wrote "The Skyline," remember that?

DeMars: Yes.

Kent: I went on a trip around the country, after I'd worked for six weeks on a construction job, on a Greyhound bus. I went to different places in the south, and then New York City. Mumford wasn't there; he was up in Amenia writing The Culture of Cities,

he later told me. But he gave me names, and people to see, and I went to see different people.

DeMars: Had you met him before this?

Kent: No.

DeMars: Just out of the blue.

Kent: Just writing a letter. And then that summer I also went to Chicago, and I went out to Spring Green, Wisconsin, and I knocked on Taliesin's door. I had the name of a young guy who was known to Mrs. Schevill, who was the wife of a Spanish professor at Berkeley, Margaret Schevill. She knew lots of people in the arts.

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Kent: I was invited to stay the night, and Frank Lloyd Wright walked me around the fields the next morning with his great cape on, his floppy hat and his big cane. He was very generous and happy that morning. It was a beautiful morning. And the guy that I made contact with through Margaret Schevill was one of his younger slaves, and I slept on the floor in his room. I never stayed in touch with him; I didn't really know the guy. Margaret knew about him. But he was from here, and so I was aware of that, and the whole thing dominated by one guy. You know that.

DeMars: Just to interject: my only visit to Taliesin was some years later, and with Oscar Stonorov. We were at some kind of a meeting in near enough around, and we went out there. We went through the place, and I think it would have been summertime, and no one was there, they were all out at Taliesin West at the time, and Oscar said, "My God, this man builds beautiful ruins." [laughter]

Kent: Stonorov did the sculpture of Catherine.

DeMars: I was going to say, he did the sculpture and he's an architect, and he was very close to the head of the CIO--.

Kent: Reuther.

DeMars: Reuther. Walter Reuther. He was in the plane with Reuther when the plane crashed, and they were both killed. He was in the process of doing some large project for him, and he was really one of the good guys, wouldn't you say, of housing?

Kent: Oh, no question about it.

DeMars: And a very interesting man. Good friend of Catherine's, and he knew all these people.

Riess: You were defining how you were "left liberal."

Kent: Oh, yes. Well, Stiles Hall was a big influence in my life. Two and a half years, put it that way.

DeMars: I'll throw in another little bit. Maybe you can put this some other place. This is about Walter Packard, telling about when he was with a group like Stiles Hall at one time, rather religious I guess in its orientation--.

Kent: No, it's a YMCA, but it--

DeMars: Well, that's what I meant. Only to that extent.

Kent: --it has the word Christian in the name.

DeMars: Yes, all right. But he went down to talk to a group of people, to get them to join the YMCA or whatever it was, and to bring them this kind of understanding. I think he was to convert them from being communists or socialists or something.

Kent: At Stiles Hall?

DeMars: No, I can't remember just where it was. But he tells a story that he met with them a number of times, and the thing was, they converted him!

Kent: To his socially-conscious self?

DeMars: To his social career, yes.

Kent: That sounds like Stiles Hall.

Communists were known human beings in the two years, junior and senior, that I was on the campus. Charlie Rosenthal, who was the great columnist in the Daily Cal, who had a column of his own, was a communist, and a good friend of mine. He wasn't in Stiles Hall. Stiles Hall was a moderating influence in my life, certainly. And there were other students who were members of the Communist Party, none that I know of in architecture in my generation. I'm sure there were in other generations. Some in my generation became communists, or became known as communists and suffered because of that.

But I was somehow never--well, Stiles Hall involved some remarkable leadership people--Harry Kingman and then Bill Davis,

and now John Martin. Stiles Hall was an open forum. Any ideas. And during the '36-37, '37-38, the only place a communist, a known communist, could speak in Berkeley was inside of Stiles Hall. He couldn't speak on the campus, he couldn't speak on the streets of Berkeley. Stiles Hall had the only place. The churches didn't--I guess they didn't end up trying to get into the churches. Kingman's advisory board included President Sproul and a lot of students. And the student governing board ran the show, Kingman didn't tell them what to do. I was on the cabinet. That's just part of my education about the Bill of Rights, and all of that. And the peace strikes were on, and I was part of this.

DeMars: Your close friend who was the communist--.

Kent: Charlie Rosenthal. His father was an engineer, my father knew him in the city.

DeMars: Did he ever--if he was a close friend--did he ever take you aside and suggest you join the party?

Kent: No. Nobody ever did that.

DeMars: No, it didn't happen to me either. I was wondering why. How did the ones--I knew a couple of people, at least, in Telesis, who were, and in fact--well, since it's in the public realm and known, Syd Williams was.

Kent: Yes, a classmate of mine. It was after he'd graduated, after I graduated. He didn't go in for any political reason.

DeMars: And he got fired from--

Kent: Cincinnati.

DeMars: From the University, too. He said that Kerr fired him from here. That's his claim.

Kent: If you want to get into that whole question, the University imposed a loyalty oath, right?

DeMars: Yes.

Kent: And people who had been communists, within a five-year period prior to that, literally couldn't sign the oath without lying. Well, he signed, and he hadn't been an active communist I don't think ever. I didn't know this until afterwards, it all came out. But there was a four-and-a-half year period when he had gone to meetings, induced by other architect friends, [Robert] Anshen and others, and he was there because his wife was a powerhouse. She

lives in Berkeley. She is a powerhouse, and she's probably a hardworking, able communist leader today. Mary Merrill.

Riess: This is the wife of Syd Williams?

Kent: Yes, and that marriage broke up a long time ago. So, that's the beginning of that story.

Riess: It sounds like already you were part of a Berkeley community from a liberal tradition. The Tolmans certainly were.

Kent: Yes, but I didn't meet Mary until after I graduated, just before I went to Europe and came back. I knew the family. But we had--Meiklejohn was around. Our Beta class, O'Flaherty and Ziegler and me, the three of us--I was a year ahead of them--organized Friday night discussion sessions at the Beta house. We'd say, "What are we doing in this crazy fraternity?" It was a good place to eat and sleep, and there were some good friends there, but we finally discovered that fraternities were the result of the civil war, and brotherhood, and manhood, and they also had things in their constitutions that said this was to promote intellectual growth, and all that, so we proceeded to do that.

We invited Meiklejohn to come to the first of those Friday evening sessions. That must have been when I was a sophomore, maybe a junior. That's when I first met Meiklejohn. He lived right across the street from the Tolmans, and he would have died before he'd been a faculty member. He was just a free spirit. Professor of philosophy, powerhouse.

DeMars: But he wasn't a communist.

Kent: Oh, no. But he was concerned all the time about the freedom of speech.

Riess: He was a founder of the Northern California ACLU.

Kent: Card-carrying member. It's so funny, that "card-carrying member" thing. You criticized communists because they carried cards, not ACLU members, and then Bush succeeds in smearing-- [Referring to campaign smear in the Bush-Dukakis Presidential campaign, 1988.]

DeMars: Yes.

Kent: But anyhow, the point is, I don't know, I think I was just too naive and too pure. And also, both my parents were Republicans, and my sister was a reactionary capitalist, still is. [laughter] My dear sister. I wish I had known more communists in my

generation like Rosenthal, and some--well, I think Bruce Waybur was. Remember Bruce Waybur?

DeMars: No.

Kent: He was a Rhodes scholar, a year ahead of me. And do you know Gordon Griffiths?

DeMars: It rings a bell.

Kent: Gordon Griffiths' father was a regent. He was one or two years ahead of me. He's alive and well right now. He also went to Oxford for two years. I met these guys in the Student Affairs Council. It was like the supreme court. We administered or recommended justice.

DeMars: Student infringements of the rules?

Kent: Yes. There were four juniors and four seniors, and then the juniors stayed on and then they appointed four more. But at that time we refused to go along with our role, which was to make examples of students who cheated. We said, "No, we think the University ought to have a psychiatric advising service over there at Cowell Hall," something like that. That must have been part of the beginning of what became that counseling service. That was a cross-section of campus people that I got to know that was completely apart from architecture and completely apart from Stiles Hall, although several of them were active in the student cabinet.

Serge Chermayeff

Kent: I want you guys to see this picture, because this tells a little something about the link between our two groups. [looking at photographs] This is down at the mouth of Tomales Bay in 1940 [August 22]. This is [Serge] Chermayeff, and that's his English wife, and that's Mary Kent and me--Mary Tolman--and Gilbert Lewis's son, Ted Lewis, he's an Inverness man, and Edward Tolman. I don't recognize that person, but the picture was taken by Margaret Schevill. But this was one of those things that happened in those years. Once or twice in the summer you went down, had a crabbing expedition. Mary and I were hosting the Chermayeffs.

DeMars: Where are you?

Kent: I'm there. This is Chermayeff.

DeMars: Here? The glasses and the curly hair? [laughs]

Kent: Yes. Chermayeff had been very friendly and helpful to me in London.

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DeMars: Did he talk about coming to this country then?

Kent: I don't remember that.

DeMars: I was wondering whether you by any chance told him about things going on. That would have been when? Thirty-nine?

Kent: Would have been '39. I didn't know it.

DeMars: I don't remember quite when it happened, but I was under the impression I was one of the first people he saw when he came here--and I think I told you about this before. He asked me to have lunch with him, and he said that he had decided to leave England and find a place in the world.

He studied the atlas and considered all different places he might go to, and decided to go to the U.S. Then he studied the situation in the U.S. and decided on the West Coast, and of the West Coast, San Francisco was it. He would come to San Francisco, he would teach at the University, and so forth. That was his plan. He sort of announced that. I was to get it arranged for him to get a job, to meet people in the faculty.

Well, I didn't have that much connection, and I was taken a little bit aback by the direct movement this way. Apparently he went to the faculty and said, "I'm going to teach here--"

Kent: Just the same way [Eric] Mendelsohn did.

DeMars: But I think Chermayeff, if he had just held off--

Kent: I agree. Now, let me tell you about my Chermayeff. I met him because somehow I got linked up with the young people, my age, or your age, from the AA that were in the MARS group, through a German named Korn, Arthur Korn, another Jewish-German refugee. They were designing a scheme for redoing London, the whole of London. Remember I brought the scheme back? And while I was there, I was encouraged by Korn and Chermayeff to do a scheme for redoing San Francisco and the Bay Area, and that's when I started to think big, you know. "Why wait?" [laughs] And I did studies

and made sketches and things like that. For years I had them around.

Chermayeff was a very open and friendly person to me, and I met his wife too. Then all of a sudden in 1940 he arrived out here. I heard about him, and so we just invited him up there. I remember he had only been here a few days or weeks or something, and we were going through one of those pathways in Inverness in the old town, the old rights-of-ways where streets weren't built, there are a whole series of paths that the locals take care of--Corwin does it now, he's an Inverness man, too--and Chermayeff said, "This is what I thought California was going to be like!" But there weren't many places like Inverness, as it turned out. They stayed for a year or two in the Bay Area. They lived up behind Mills. He was a very nice man.

But the point is, I began to think, because I was going to have to come home, I'd had my year away, and all of a sudden here were these guys in London, young people, redesigning the whole of London. Terrible scheme, as it turned out, you know. I mean, they were going to gut the whole central part of London and do a kind of plan like Copenhagen's.

Riess: Why were they going to tear it up?

Kent: Well, they assumed that the docks would have to be redone. It was La Ville Radieuse, it was inspired by that.

DeMars: Oh, were they literally going to tear down the ancient monuments and things?

Kent: Many of them. Like clearing the Western Addition [San Francisco]. So the point is that there were younger people involved that I somehow met, which hadn't happened in all the other places I went to--I went to lots of places.

A Meeting in Zurich, October 1938

Riess: Now we've gotten ahead of the actual meeting of you and Mr. DeMars in Zurich.

DeMars: [to Kent] how long had you been over there when we met? I'll give the circumstances of our meeting, but what had happened just before you'd come to Zurich?

Kent: I guess I landed with a group that I was going to be loosely associated with in Hamburg, maybe in July or August, and stayed in

Hamburg, studied German for several weeks, and then bicycled down to Freiburg where I was going to be situated. I landed there the night before the Chamberlain-Hitler pact, and all Americans were evacuated the next day thirty miles away to Basel. And then that sort of settled down in the minds of lots of people, and I went back to Freiburg.

Then it must have been that fall that the Schevills came, Margaret Schevill and her younger son Jim--Margaret was in the process of getting a divorce from Rudolph, and she was working with Jung in Zurich. And Jim's older brother Karl was my sister's husband by that time. They married in '38, just before I went away. And so, I was in Zurich several times. It was an easy trip, half an hour to Basel, and maybe half an hour from Basel to Zurich. So we met in that fall sometime, and you know better than I do whether it was Thanksgiving or before or after.

DeMars: Yes. Another question: when was Chamberlain's meeting? When was that big umbrella meeting?

Kent: That was the end of September. I think.

DeMars: And what was the period between when this deadline was given for the Sudetenland business, because I was in Prague the weekend when this was being decided, or something. I don't know when--did Chamberlain come over right then, or something, to settle that thing? Because apparently it had been resolved by that next week, I guess.

Kent: Here is my recollection of that disastrous meeting, from my point of view, generally. Chamberlain and Daladier in effect gave Czechoslovakia to Hitler, by saying that the Germans who lived in the edges of Czechoslovakia that bordered on Germany can be protected by Hitler's German troops. And what happened was the German troops went right into all of Czechoslovakia, and straightened out that Czech government, had a pro-German government.

DeMars: We went from Prague to Vienna--this is Art Steiner and me--and then to Budapest over the weekend, and we were in Budapest a couple of days. When we got back, the youth hostel we'd been staying in was filled with refugees, women and children and so forth, and the big place where we'd been sleeping on the floor--we couldn't find our luggage and so forth. We did finally. I was just trying to see how that fit together.

Kent: And then did you go to Zurich?

DeMars: Well, then we went to Zurich. That would be en route there.

Kent: That would be in October or November. You had three months when I was around there. When did you come home?

DeMars: Well, we went to Italy, maybe a week or something down in there. I came home shortly after, maybe November.

Kent: Has our friend here heard the way we met?

DeMars: No, I'm leading--

Kent: [to Riess, aside] This is a great story. We've never had a chance to tell this one.

DeMars: We landed in Zurich, and I don't know why that got included in the route. You asked me several times who told us places to go and so forth. I don't know that anybody did particularly.

I told you I carried Mumford's book with me on that trip, even though it was a big, heavy thick thing that I had to carry around in baggage. I don't think I mentioned that on going through Germany, when we came across the border there, we were in a compartment with a couple of Germans, and we were sitting on the opposite side.

The border guard came through and wanted to see what we had in our baggage. There was this book in there, Mumford's Culture of Cities, and he turns to the German and says, "Was ist diese?" and the man replies, "Kultur von Stadt." The guard shrugged and put it down. When he left the compartment, the German said, "Dumkopf, that's on the verboten list!"

Well, anyway, Zurich got included. I was very much interested, I knew about Neubühl, and I think Catherine has it in her book.

Kent: That's new housing.

DeMars: This is a very modern housing development of excellent design. And as we did in several other places, we wanted to know, "Who did this, where are their offices?" and we'd go up and cold turkey, ring the bell. So we went to the office of, I think it's Haefeli, one of the architects of the Neubühl group. We asked about him, and a young man came out and talked to us. He said that Haefeli was out of town for several days. And you know--we always like to get personalities included here--I swear that the one that we talked to was a young German who finally came to Berkeley.

Kent: His name was Ostwald?

DeMars: Hans Ostwald? Is that it? That's it. Is he from Zurich?

Kent: I think maybe.

DeMars: He said, "Well, do you know the Doldertal Flats?" We were thinking of things to see. We wanted to see Neubühl anyway, even if the architects weren't there. He said, "You should go and meet Alfred Roth," the architect of the Doldertal Flats. Roth and Breuer had designed these two identical apartment houses. There were to have been three--sort of zig, zig, zig, on a hill, stepping up the hill. I could see why there was a sympathy for our Chandler thing later, this identical building going zig, zig, zig, you see, a slight angle to the road.

And the building, of course--to get all the names in--these two buildings, one of them was being done for Siegfried Gideon, Space, Time, and Architecture. Anyway, we go up, we get up there somehow, ring the doorbell, and ask could we see him, and came in. He welcomes us in, he sits us down, and so forth, and starts in talking right away--I don't know how it could have gotten along this far--but then the doorbell rings. We couldn't have been there more than about five minutes.

Kent: You know that. [laughs]

DeMars: Well, I'm just trying to think, because certainly it would have come out. Let me interject here, how did you--did you write him?

Kent: She doesn't even know that I'm there yet.

Riess: I do get the impression. [laughs]

DeMars: Well, the doorbell rings, and here's Jack at the door. Now, he's the one that had the appointment. [laughs] Roth thought that we were the Americans that were coming to see him, I guess, and he looked a little puzzled for a moment.

I seemed to have recognized you. Now, you don't think that we had ever met before?

Kent: I don't remember.

DeMars: Now, why would I have felt that? Where would we have met?

Kent: Well, did you ever go to the city planning section of the Commonwealth Club? That's another thing I should mention, goes way back in time.

DeMars: No, I didn't.

Kent: Corwin did.

DeMars: Did you know Corwin before that?

Kent: We think we did know one another. Because Corwin's boss, Roland Campbell, from the San Mateo County Planning Commission, and Dave Bohannon, the big developer, Bohannon and Campbell were in the city planning section, and my father was in it. So Corwin went as their young guy, and I went as my father's young guy.

DeMars: I almost didn't know about things like the Commonwealth Club.

Kent: Well, I only knew because of growing up in the city.

Riess: We don't have a small enough town here that the two of you wouldn't have just run into one another?

Kent: Well, I wasn't a Berkeleyan. I was just a student, getting ready to go right back to San Francisco, and straighten things out.

DeMars: And when I started working in Farm Security, before we were married, I think I must have moved home again. So I was in Oakland. And I got up in the morning and commuted and went to work, and came back at night and so forth.

Kent: And also, to my amazement--it's funny, I hadn't thought about this earlier--but as a student, I knew nothing about the Farm Security Administration. We were not in touch, aware, with all of our emergent social concern, we didn't know that there was such an office across the bay dealing with the needs of migrant farmers.

DeMars: When was Catherine's book done?

Kent: Modern Housing?

DeMars: Modern Housing.

Kent: Well, it was before she came out here, for sure. So maybe it was '36 or '37. I don't remember getting that until later. [Modern Housing was published in 1934.]

DeMars: Moise would have known about it, wouldn't he?

Kent: Oh, yes. Well, she wrote that before she did the--well, the big federal housing legislation, so that was before '36.

DeMars: Wasn't it the outgrowth of her thesis? Wasn't she Radcliffe?

Kent: Vassar. She was a writer, she wasn't a houser, or a city planning type.

DeMars: But I thought she took on that subject as something to write about.

Kent: And we're going to get back to Roth, and us meeting.

Riess: Yes. Our readers are not happy at these hiatuses.

DeMars: [laughs] I can imagine. All right. We're in Roth's apartment in Zurich.

Riess: And this guy comes in.

DeMars: This guy who is Jack Kent.

Riess: Right.

DeMars: And we're at least introduced, we shake hands and so forth, and we joke a bit about it I guess, and sit down. So then Roth continues to tell us about things going on there. I don't know that he particularly discussed the two Doldertal things, but he got in very quickly to telling us about the fact that the younger generation of architects were doing most of the new work, housing, schools, and so forth.

Kent: And the big exposition, which was to come the following year.

DeMars: Oh, I didn't know--did he talk about that at the time?

Kent: That's when they took charge. The Swiss had an international exposition before the beginning of World War I in 1914, and another great big one in 1939, just before the beginning of the Second World War. And all architects--that was a big thing.

DeMars: How this came about was because of a group called the Friends of Modern Architecture. Were they part of CIAM?

Kent: I don't know.

DeMars: Sort of overlapped, anyway. And he told us about the young group of architects there who weren't getting--

Kent: All that they wanted.

DeMars: Well, they weren't being picked to do important jobs and things. This group met and they were sort of stirring things up, and

saying that in other countries, for instance Scandinavian countries, work was given out on competition. Any important public works, and so forth, were all competition, and that was not going on in Zurich. The old boys were getting the work.

Riess: CIAM stands for--

Kent: International Congress of Modern Architecture.

Riess: What did they actually do?

DeMars: Well, they got together as Telesis did afterwards, saying you need planning, and they developed a series of credos and all the rest of the machinery.

Kent: And books. Le Corbusier, and then later, who's the Greek? Doxiodes.

DeMars: That was quite a bit later.

Kent: Much later, but he sort of tried to sponsor it, and keep the spirit of CIAM.

DeMars: Were the Bauhaus people a part of that? I mean, I think Breuer certainly.

Kent: Oh, I'm sure Breuer was. Maybe Gropius wasn't.

Riess: But Friends of Modern Architecture is the Swiss branch? And CIAM is the larger entity?

DeMars: Yes, international. [All talking!] They had a great conference in Athens.

Riess: And so Americans might be members of CIAM?

DeMars: Yes, I think they were.

Kent: If they wanted to be.

DeMars: But in England, it was the MARS group, Modern Architecture Research Society.

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Riess: Had you heard of CIAM before you went over there?

DeMars: I don't think I had, but I think I must have heard of it there, because I remember in England picking up several little pamphlets

which are someplace in my household here, done by the MARS group, coming out of the AA, the Architectural Association in London.

Riess: Had you [Kent] heard of CIAM?

Kent: I think I had, I think Le Corbusier's things. At least one book I knew about before I graduated, called The City of Tomorrow. Ever see that? That was the one where the picture in front shows somebody swinging a great sledgehammer and knocking a brick wall down, something like that. And his terrible philosophy was to get rid of all these beautiful medieval and renaissance cities and build.

DeMars: La Ville Radieuse.

Kent: La Ville Radieuse, a disaster--

DeMars: He was going to scoop out the middle of Paris.

Kent: --which we perpetrated here and there, until we woke up.

Riess: But out here in California, basically you were not that involved with it.

Kent: We weren't thinking of joining the CIAM.

DeMars: No, and in a sense, this was going to be like--we considered that a little bit like the pope in Rome: anyone working on this, you'd follow their rules, in a sense. Wasn't that it?

Kent: Well, maybe--we were more confused than you were, Vernon. We loved Maybeck, without knowing we--

DeMars: Well, true. I didn't--

Kent: I'm not saying you didn't, but I'm just saying that we were just more local frogs.

DeMars: How did you react to seeing housing in Germany and so forth?

Kent: Went to all the places, I saw the Frankfurt stuff and Stockholm, Finland.

DeMars: Well, were you sympathetic? Did you think they'd accomplished something?

Kent: Yes and no. I didn't understand why all these things were in picture books and praised so much. Of course, where did I live? I lived right smack in the middle of medieval Freiburg, on the

fifth floor of the family that had the top--the fourth and fifth floors. I didn't go to try and live in a nice, modern place. I could see the tower. I was confused, that's all. And Mumford himself had both things going all the time.

DeMars: Yes, and he praised both.

A Mission to the Plan, the Telesis Embryo

Riess: So Roth was telling you about Friends of Modern Architecture.

DeMars: Friends of Modern Architecture. How they finally convinced the politicians and so forth that they should hold competitions for public buildings, schools, housing projects and so forth, and their gang began to win the competitions.

Kent: Major competitions.

DeMars: Yes, major things. This had been going on for several years, apparently. Or a couple of years.

Kent: And it climaxed the next year in the big exposition.

DeMars: Yes.

So, he tells us this, and that's about all of that meeting. One little anecdote: he was showing a school that he was working on, pointing with his finger at the plans, it had the classrooms, and they were along here with a sort of single long hallway, "And here is the room for this, and at the end is a large room for the arts and craps, no?"

Kent: He mispronounced it.

DeMars: I remember turning to you, you and Art. All three of us gulped and bit our tongues. [laughs] Do you remember that? Does it come back?

Kent: I verify it.

DeMars: Yes. Then the next thing. We didn't ask where they, the "Friends," met, but he must have told us that they met in the non-alcoholic bar which is down facing the lake, or the waterway into it. And it rather puzzled us, that architects--or did it puzzle us at all at that time?

Kent: Had the sense to have a great club of their own?

DeMars: Well, no, no, no, that they didn't drink alcohol.

Kent: We took care of that by going to another place to get our drinks.

DeMars: Oh, yes, right. But we sat there--

Kent: We sat there and dreamed.

DeMars: That's what I'm leading up to. Now, maybe you can tell us, what did we start dreaming about?

Kent: I think you're right. We were both from the Bay Area, both had been to Cal, and that's the first time I learned about the Farm Security Administration. And I didn't learn very much.

DeMars: You mean right then, from me?

Kent: Yes, right. I'd never heard of it. And you had your pictures there. You showed them to me. I don't think you showed them to Roth until later.

DeMars: No, I didn't, you see, because--

Kent: He went back to Roth. They were featured in a book.

DeMars: And I explained that, but let's finish our little thing here.

Kent: So my thoughts were probably, since--my thoughts were just indigenous to the Bay Area.

DeMars: Well, so were mine, in a sense.

Kent: Yes, I know. But you were a whole two or three classes ahead, and you had gainful employment. I was unemployed, but on a scholarship for a year. Not any idea what I was going to do when I got back, except I'm not going to be an architect. That was my decision. No way! I was dreaming that there'd be something to do in city planning or housing. That was basically it.

And so, I guess we must have talked about the group that I was part of, I kept in touch with. Eight or ten of us. They were here, either doing graduate work or getting out and getting work, Spangle, Gryff Partridge, Syd.

DeMars: Now, was Gryff Partridge in architecture?

- Kent: Oh, yes. He was a student in our class, he was a fifth-year. He stretched it out because he was working part of the time.
- DeMars: Doing photography at that time?
- Kent: No, Gryff didn't do any photography. Ron was the photographer, wonderful Welsh name, Rondel. And, of course, Imogen [Cunningham] was the mother.
- DeMars: So it's Ron that I see down here at the Star Grocery?
- Kent: You see Ron here. Gryff lives in Marin County.
- DeMars: Ron is my neighbor. I hope I haven't called him Gryff.
- Kent: Anyhow. So there was sort of a real cohesive group based on four years in Berkeley that I identified with without any trouble, and I knew we'd be sort of trying to find ways to do things when we got home. Here was a senior citizen [DeMars] who knew all these things, and had done things, built things, and so we were talking.
- DeMars: Yes. I sensed that in the Bay Area, we were way back in the middle ages, sort of, in the buildings that you saw around. There were a few examples of the modern movement having gotten into a place like San Francisco. Why would I have sensed that the planning activity of San Francisco was not all that it might be at that time?
- Kent: No city had an active city planning operation. A few counties got started.
- DeMars: Did I or you say, "Why don't we start something like the Friends of Modern Architecture when we get back," or something like that? Because it seems to me that right at that moment, we sort of had that idea.
- Kent: That was the spirit, certainly.
- DeMars: "God, look what these guys have done, and they don't even know about modern architecture where we are. We ought to get together, a gang of us--."
- Kent: I was aware of--and am I going to say this right? maybe not--I was going to say that I was aware of slums in San Francisco. I don't think I was then. Dorothy Erskine, whom I met in '39--Fran introduced her to me--became active because of Catherine. Not just because of Catherine, but when Catherine was here in '38-39, along with Alex Meiklejohn and Helen Meiklejohn, she activated and participated with a group in San Francisco that brought what had

been the first San Francisco Housing Association back to life. There had been an association created after the earthquake, and that had died out, Alice Griffiths and those people.

But I was just delighted to have your experience and enthusiasm for the same sort of thing. I think you were the first guy I really met ahead of me.

Riess: It sounds like you had a general dissatisfaction, but you didn't have a specific bunch of problems in mind to solve but he [DeMars] already was able to define what the problems were.

Kent: Right. And we were so fresh out of school in our year, people were trying to decide whether to be an architect, or somebody who does housing, or city planning. Nobody really knew. I had just postponed that for a year.

DeMars: It seems to me that Art Steiner had indigestion that night, or something, and he went back and went to bed.

Kent: So we kept on talking.

DeMars: I don't know how long we talked that night.

Kent: Well, what do you recollect?

DeMars: Well, nothing more than this. I thought you might add something.

Riess: Did you think that the first thing to do as a group was to put on an exhibition?

DeMars: Oh, no, just, here's this group in Zurich, which apparently was an ongoing situation, which accomplished these things. We ought to get with like-minded guys when we got back, get such a group together in San Francisco.

Riess: Well, what things did it accomplish? Reminding architects that they could take their futures in their own hands?

DeMars: Yes, well, I think it wasn't going to be changed until some of the--I don't think even people like Bill Wurster were getting big jobs. They were doing houses. We were knowledgeable about Wurster, Gardner Dailey, Fred Confer, and so forth, none of whom had done anything other than four stories, houses. There were important buildings and so forth coming along, and I guess we were thinking housing would be coming along, and that the other people who typically got the big jobs would be doing things like the housing, unless--

Kent: And they did. Arthur Brown, first housing project. And Perry too.

DeMars: Yes, I guess that's so. Now, this would be the very kind of thing, you see, that the Zurich gang had turned around. Yes, Perry did one, didn't he? And, of course, they were experienced in building, but they weren't full of the philosophy of what our generation was.

Riess: Is that because they already had established, large firms?

DeMars: Well, just simply, you have to break through the wall of the ongoing large firm, and how do you do it? You have competitions.

Riess: Or get a job with a large firm?

DeMars: Yes, but if you had a job in Arthur Brown's office, you did Arthur Brown's type of things for him. You were a draftsman.

I think Farm Security was a bit unique. Guys as young as I and Burt and so forth were, by this time, at the top, the head architects of our little group, through circumstances we've talked about before. But I think in any other normal market kind of operation, there would have been a much more experienced old-timer with a large office. The office and the running of it was sort of put together for us, you see. We served the purpose by doing what we were doing--in Farm Security, I'm talking about now--which we thought was an admirable way to have things be, and it should happen on the outside.

Riess: When you talked about going back and putting this group together, was this out of self-interest so that you all get more jobs?

DeMars: Oh, we just thought that it was what the world deserved, what the city deserved.

Riess: Well, that's a different way of thinking about it. Are you saying that here were these visionary people in Zurich, and they were getting good jobs. "We want those good jobs." Or, are you saying, "Here are wrongs to be righted."

DeMars: No, I think it was much more almost--what am I trying to say--missionary, in the sense of when we got back, to get this going so that we would join what's going on in the world, but in our own way, here. Housing is a problem, we need better planning, we need all these things here.

Kent: It was missionary, as well as self-aggrandizement.

DeMars: Yes, but the other, we felt, would come. It was, how do you get the changes made if the older gang is going to go on doing their stuff? We've got to have a voice, and got to show people what's possible.

Kent: It was complicated, in a way. I know from my father, and from Warren Perry, and Arthur Brown's office and staff, that many of those men of the old generation didn't believe the government should subsidize housing for poor people. This wasn't going to be good for them; in the long run, it's bad for our society. It's the same thing we went through with Brother Reagan. You know. And yet, they got these federal projects because of the normal seniority system of life, and so it was all mixed up with--"My God, how can we do good? We want to do good. And incidentally, we can help wonderful architecture, and improve the cities, and all that." And so the social motivation was a primary thing, but nobody quite knew. We still have it, we're going to have more and more.

I became basically an anti-Washington D.C. person very early in my career, because of architecture and city planning solutions having to be done locally. Any federal agency that has rules and regulations is going to just be the kiss of death for good architecture and good social programs. That happened within three or four years after I came back. So this was a big turn-around. And local leadership, professionally and in terms of social programs, was just primary.

We never talked about the social side of it with the Zurich people, and I never talked about it with the people in Paris or Helsinki or Stockholm or Copenhagen or London. They just wanted to clear away some land and build some projects, and that just wasn't going to work for people way out here, 3,000 miles away from that complicated bureaucracy back there. And of course, these guys worked for a bureaucracy that was doing good, and there was no high command back there telling them, "Don't do this, don't do that."

DeMars: There was a high command back there--

Riess: But that's because of the unique character of the people in the California office that took control.

DeMars: Exactly.

Kent: Well, and the emergency situation.

DeMars: Well, it was partly that, and that could have happened elsewhere in the country, except our particular problem of the migratory

farmworkers, the "gypsy harvesters," was considered unique, they knew nothing about it in the East. But the gang in charge of our office here could talk, as I've said, over the phone to Washington and say, "Look, you want this built this year? It's an emergency, so if you want it, we'll send you the blueprints after things are under construction. Now, get off our necks." And they would talk in those terms, jokingly or whatever, and got away with it. We didn't have--every other place had to send their plans into Washington, so they could check the dimensions or whatever.

Riess: But what you would have wanted, what would have been ideal, would have been an enlightened government. Are you saying that within three years, you had kind of given up on the notion?

DeMars: An enlightened central government?

Kent: Not me. It's impossible, by definition, I'd say.

Riess: And [to Kent] your father's generation was saying "Hands off" to the government.

Kent: That's right.

DeMars: But then the question is which government.

Kent: Partially. They were for supply-side economics, without knowing it.

DeMars: The Farm Security thing couldn't have been done without the funding of Congress, you see. And I doubt the state would have--maybe they would have thought they couldn't have afforded it. And they would have been under so much pressure in the state that it probably wouldn't have happened. So the fact that under the New Deal and Roosevelt and so forth these funds were available to do this kind of thing, a remedial thing, like an earthquake or flood, famine, or something else--.

Kent: Good answer. Better the Red Cross. [laughter] The International Federation, too. Not just one Red Cross.

Riess: Getting a city planner and a city planning bureaucracy into the city of San Francisco was on the agenda as soon as you formed the Tesis group?

Kent: Absolutely, on my part, yes. We were going to hold our noses and go into the city hall and be bureaucrats. It was just a terrible decision to make, but we made it. These guys did it with the Farm Security Administration, but that was not an established, lifetime work, you see.

Riess: It was like a sacrifice?

Kent: Absolutely. And yet--well, Corwin led the way in going into San Mateo County. And his boss, who was an architecture guy, graduated in the twenties, Ronald Campbell, very unusually gifted guy, worked there for maybe ten years with great originality under a consultant, Pomeroy, but got out as soon as he could to work for Bohannon, private developer. I'm sure that his great feeling of accomplishment in his life was with Bohannon, building big subdivisions in San Leandro just before the war and all that. But the rest of us stayed in. That's been true, there's a whole generation, and it's dangerous because of that. There's some real bureaucrats among us.

An Earlier Generation: T. J. Kent, Sr. and the Burnham Plan

Kent: I think the Telesis part of this oral history, however it can be done, I don't know, should spend some time and energy trying to discover a longer historical background to what Telesis seemed to be than just the generation of Vernon and me, and our various colleagues. I think it was in the tradition of architects in San Francisco after the earthquake, and in the city planning section of the Commonwealth Club. That's enough to get you started.

Riess: And so, where did it get derailed?

Kent: Oh, no, I don't think it necessarily got derailed. It just, these things take time, that's all. I think they felt they did tremendous things, as I mentioned, the Muni Railway and the tunnels, all the schools, the City Hall, the Civic Center. The Ferry Building by the other Brown, A. Page Brown. And John Galen Howard--well, the campus, the Campanile. And Golden Gate Park. Those things weren't part of a group like Telesis, but they were part of a metropolitan culture that wanted things like that to happen.

Riess: The boulevards and the big schemes.

Kent: Yes, and maybe our generation was saying, "Let's now do the interstices and everything for the common man." And we were part of that. But part of our inspiration, I think, comes from that past. Well, the Panama-Pacific Exposition was for everybody. Everybody in the city loved that.

- Riess: And you would never destroy any of those boulevards and schemes of the past?
- Kent: Look what happened to the Palace of Fine Arts.
- Riess: When you [DeMars] were drawing your city of the future in those drawings that we will talk about again, would you have dared to destroy the boulevards of the past?
- Kent: Bulldoze?
- DeMars: Well, streets have a tremendous survival in these times, partly because they're all so filled with utilities and everything else, as an actual thing.
- Riess: Did you value what Jack is talking about?
- DeMars: Well, yes. I was terribly moved by the exposition. We have a half a dozen books on it that the family had gotten and so forth. I was there. We went every weekend, practically, to it.
- Kent: You were six or seven years old. Lucky dog!
- DeMars: This was something we did just about every weekend. And also the scale of it, and the order of it, and the beauty!
- Kent: The location, my God.
- DeMars: Oh, yes.
- Kent: The bay, and Mount Tamalpais.
- DeMars: Yes. I had felt that that was the sort of end of the golden age in men's concept of--the notion that you could then plan a great thing and carry it out, like Kubla Khan's great pleasure dome, or whatever.
- Kent: Well, I think of BART, and the greenbelt, as being big-scale things. And the Golden Gate National Recreation area. It takes time, but big chunks get into place.
- DeMars: That's different. I was thinking of it as an architectural kind of thing, you see, this other, which was a big concept. And that isn't likely--well, it was tried at places like MIT and so forth. I think, as I look at the current magazine of the AIA, there are several things that are going on of that scale now, almost. There's something going on in France, which I'd never seen before. It's some private complex that must have cost about a billion

bucks to do, or something. It's very ordered, it's back to sort of Baroque architecture again.

Kent: What I was saying about historical background was that in those early years, the first ten to twenty years of his practice, my father was just like we were. They were doing large-scale things.

DeMars: Well, look at the fair, 1915.

Kent: Yes. That was their time, they designed all the kiosks, they lived right out on the marina.

Riess: What do you mean, they were just like you were in the early days?

Kent: I think they viewed human shelter needs in terms of architecture, landscape architecture, and city planning. The whole enchilada. They thought in those terms. For example, San Francisco engaged Michael M. O'Shaughnessy as the city engineer in 1912. He was there for twenty years. One of my father's relatives was an engineer, Loren Hunt. He lived in Berkeley. He designed the Twin Peaks Tunnel. The O'Shaughnessy crew designed and built the whole Municipal Railway, the first publicly-owned transit system in the USA. They designed the cars, and they built them out here.

The city had a city architect; the title was there in the charter. And the city architect, either himself or with other people, designed the city schools. So there were two professional honchos right there. City planning emerged finally, with respect, only really after the war. The Telesis show hatched the city planning enterprise in the city hall. There's no question about it. The leadership then was Dorothy Erskine and others who made it happen.

But those ideas all were part of my unconscious background. I never gave it a second thought as a kid growing up. We would go and see buildings, we'd go frequently to the Legion of Honor, go to Golden Gate Park, go to all these places, and enjoy them. And go downtown to eat, where the gang would have been--my father's gang--Coppa's or Girard's or Solari's, you name it.

Here, this sort of makes that point. [showing card] This is a Christmas card that Willis Polk--my father was working in his office--had my dad draw for him. He drew this, and then they put that [Burnham statement] in. And then I guess in 1918, the year after I was born, Polk sent these out to his friends.

And here's an architect who's saying what this guy's saying, and that's Burnham.¹ Just think of being around the earthquake, and then seeing, knowing, that Burnham had been brought out here to make a plan for the city before the earthquake.

DeMars: Yes. And the plan was actually presented, completed, along about in March or something, like a few weeks before the earthquake.

Kent: And many things that happened afterwards were influenced by the plan, but many things were not.

But there was a generation that was like Telesis earlier, that's what I'm trying to say. And I think that they had probably a stronger sense of place in San Francisco and the Bay Area, and lack of--here I go again--lack of concern whether you need somebody 3,000 miles away to straighten things out and get going than our confused generation here. We grew up in the Depression and the war, which transformed what you thought about who's in charge around here. And I think that's part of our confusion, and it was part.

DeMars: And of course, the generation with Polk that did the exposition in 1915 was really quite--

Kent: Oh, yes. And he must have done ten major buildings downtown, which are the great buildings.

[both talking]

DeMars: Who was the landscape architect for Golden Gate Park? McLaren. His role in planning for the Exposition was very important. So there was a case.

The New Architecture. Alfred Roth

Kent: Now, to wrap up the meeting with Roth, I'm sure Vernon's right in his recollection that he was thinking, and I was listening and agreeing basically, knowing that as part of this younger group,

¹"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we're gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. - Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty." Daniel H. Burnham, 1907.

that when we get home, we ought to try to get together somehow and work for our ideas and ourselves. I mean, not selfishly, but--see, those of us who became bureaucrats, went to the public trough and stayed there, me, Corwin, Spangle, Syd. Not a day in a private enterprise office, ever. But never, after a few years, in a federal agency. That was what we brought to the cause, and stayed with it. I think it's probably true that that conversation we had was probably one of those early happy chances, that we began to think that way.

Fran and the guys in Farm Security were doing it earlier, no doubt. I mean, you just must have imagined that when FDR fades away, there's not going to be an agency for you guys to do this free thinking and free designing. You're going to have to do something else.

DeMars: Well, I don't know if we crossed that bridge at the moment. We were pretty busy.

Kent: It would have turned sour, for sure.

DeMars: Back to Zurich again, and Roth. After our meeting that night I must have phoned him or something and said, "Can I come and see you about something that might interest you." I don't know, maybe you even suggested it. No, I don't think it was.

Kent: No, I saw him later myself, several times.

DeMars: I had these few photos. I'm trying to think--Chandler had been finished by then, and he must have told us--did he tell us about this book he was working on?

Kent: I think he must have. He had already published some books.

DeMars: Yes, but this particular thing.

Kent: Max Bill, isn't that the publisher?

DeMars: No, it's Girsberger. Have you ever seen this book?

Kent: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I sure have. I was delighted; I was there at the birth.

DeMars: Yes. Well, the thing was, he was doing this book, and I think he must have told us, because that would have been maybe what inspired this.

Kent: I'm sure he did.

DeMars: And he told us how he was going to do it, so you could compare it around, and it was going to explain what is modern architecture, what is the movement.

Riess: The book is The New Architecture.

DeMars: The New Architecture, yes, not modern, The New Architecture. So, I can't remember just exactly how this came in. I probably didn't have the photos when I went up the first time. Then, "Could I come back and show him this thing?" And I don't even think I had in mind putting it into the book, because it wasn't that specific. But the point was, when I showed these things, he was excited. He was excited because he was planning to include a Russian collective farm, and he didn't want it to be that political, and his publishers were already raising questions about this communist business, I guess, and so forth.

He wanted to show that with the new architecture you could take this kind of thing and do it. And here was exactly what he was talking about, in a sense. And it was much more politically safe, you see, than the Russian thing, and he just said right then, "I've been trying to find something else, and this will be it. Can we do this together? I will write you, and you send me the other material when you get back," and so on. This would round out his twenty examples, because this was the one that they were arguing about. And so that's the way the thing got started.

Riess: That's great. And the book came out in 1940?

DeMars: In 1940. Through '39, we corresponded back and forth. This [letter from him] came a little bit later, saying that I could get other copies, of course, at the cut rate. [reading and translating from letter in French from Roth] The war was on, and also--the tragedy is very difficult for them, too. "If I know of any universities and this kind of thing that would purchase the book--anything I can do in this line would be much appreciated, and so forth."

Riess: Okay. So then you came back and went your separate ways.

DeMars: Yes. I came back, you see, to find Corwin having left. Oh, I think we need to back up again in all of this. Why did I go to Europe at that time? Because Farm Security was shut down.

Kent: Budget fight, probably, in the high command. [laughs]

DeMars: It would have been at the beginning of '38, you see. There was a period--there was another job that I had, and I had forgotten. Because the '39 Fair, I worked for a while in the drafting office.

Kent: Of Arthur Brown.

DeMars: No, no. It was the office for the fair. It was maybe the planning office.

Kent: But he dominated.

DeMars: I don't think so.

Kent: The whole layout. Sure, he did. He was the chief architect.

DeMars: I guess so.

Kent: Absolutely.

California Housing, Inc.

Riess: That's interesting. I did have a question about whether some of the visions of the '39 fair were incorporated in your Telesis thinking.

Kent: One building, Wurster's San Francisco Building.

DeMars: Yes, because the rest of it was supposed to be something Warren Perry would have called "modern classic." A Berkeley student at one point described his project as such, and Perry afterwards giving the critique says, "Mr. So-and-so said that this is inspired by modern classic. I think it's more classified modern." Large ha-has from the class.

Then Cairns and Lucien Stark and Nick Cirino, and Corwin formed a thing called California Housing, Incorporated, thinking we knew all about housing from our experience in Farm Security, and could show the trade how to do it. The ideal at the time was that what America needed, in addition to the five-cent cigar, was a \$2,500 house. That includes the lot. We set out to do it. We incorporated, and we rented an office on Osgood Place.

Kent: Osgood Place, North Beach.

DeMars: Do you remember that? Were you ever over there?

Kent: Later. No, I wasn't there then. Pomeroy was.

DeMars: I know Pomeroy shared the office with us, a city planner Hugh Pomeroy.

Kent: Los Angeleno.

DeMars: And he had a part of it. Corwin and I spent a whole weekend whitewashing the inside of the space so that it would be all white, and exchanging limericks. We listed ninety of them before the end of the painting.

Riess: So was this to be sort of a consultancy?

DeMars: No, we were going to actually buy land, design, and build it.

Riess: How were you going to buy the land?

DeMars: Oh, we all had a little money, I guess. It didn't cost that much. We bought three lots sort of in the outskirts of San Carlos, and proceeded to do--. We took the prototype of one of our little Farm Security houses, the ones that had two bedrooms and all the facilities. We were getting those on the market for \$1,500, the house built. Well, [for this operation] we had to buy a lot and add to it, and this ought to be a little more generous, and pander a bit architecturally further than we did in Farm Security.

So we proceeded to do this. One was kind of semi-colonial, and it had a little attached garage. We thought this would be the \$2,500 house, including the lot. The second, though the same plan, had a different look, a kind of ranch house porch across the front.

Riess: And this is in the time when the Farm Security offices were closed down?

DeMars: They were closed down. I don't know if we knew if that was the end of it, or what. This must have gone on--I'll have to find that date somehow or other at sometime--it went on long enough, and I guess we got these things under construction or something. I was vice president, Burt Cairns was president, I think Corwin was the secretary.

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DeMars: Well, what happened, we did get them built, couldn't sell them, and Cirino bought one to live in! [laughs] And they did cost more than \$2,500. We had to figure they would have to go for like \$3,000, if we were going to make any profit.

The Telesis Membership--Women and Minority Members

Kent: There might be one insertion, tell me no if not. Corwin and I met by chance in London in 1939, just before September 3, the beginning of the war. Corwin left. But he had introduced me to Gordon Stevenson, who became a good friend of all of us. That put us right directly in touch with Abercrombie and Sir Raymond Unwin and Garden Cities and the Greenbelt around London, and the whole London thing. That was a big event in my life, as it turned out, because a lot of what we were thinking of doing around here seems to be, I think, to meet a comparable need and situation.

The fact that I happened to have met Corwin there--Corwin and I met in the basement of the Tate Gallery. I had a buckle with "California" on it. Corwin came up to me and said, "You're from California?" I said, "Yes." And that's how it started. We may have seen one another at one of these city planning sections of the Commonwealth Club meetings, but I don't remember that. But from that we then went back together and had a meal, and he introduced me to Stevenson. He and his wife, who was American, had to move out when the bombs came, and I took over their apartment, because I lost my fare home. It was a German liner. So I was there for several weeks.

Riess: Did you talk to Corwin about the things you had been talking with Vernon about?

Kent: I don't know whether we did or not. Well, he knew Stevenson, and he knew about, of course, Garden Cities. We all knew something about this from Mumford's books.

Riess: Did you talk to him about going back, and trying to put together a group?

Kent: I don't know whether we did or not. We certainly talked about getting together when we got back. That was the natural, normal thing.

But I was impressed because here was Corwin, a living creature who had a job in a planning agency, San Mateo County, and that was one of the first actual planners I had ever met.

Riess: "November and December of 1939, two independent groups, one in San Francisco and the other at UC, join together. Jack Kent joins them."

Kent: Who says that?

Riess: I think Fran.

Kent: I'm not sure our group was really a group. We were a continuation of the four-year friendship and co-thinking, but I don't remember us--. I'd only been back a few weeks when I met Fran, you know, at the Tolman cocktail party. And maybe they had talked about a group. They might have.

Riess: Fran kept minutes, and the first meeting was August 23. The second meeting was September 6 at the New Columbus: Cairns, DeMars, Eckbo, Violich. September 20: Cairns, DeMars, Eckbo, [Philip] Joseph, [Joseph] McCarthy, Violich, and Ed Williams. Then, by November 2, 1939, the members are Cairns, DeMars, [John] Dinwiddie, Eckbo, Joseph, Kent, Landor, Mocine, [William] Spangle, Steiner, Torossian, Violich, Ed Williams, and Bob Williams.

DeMars: My, a growing conspiracy.

Riess: From what I understand the system was that each time you met, each member was permitted to bring another?

DeMars: One or two more. We didn't want to get swamped.

Kent: Once there was contact with the class of '38, then we came in with about six or seven people, and everything started to go.

DeMars: Before you came you said, "I have three guys, should I bring them over?"

Kent: It never happened that way.

DeMars: You just brought them.

Kent: I don't know how we did it. I think Fran could remember this better than any of us. The meeting arrangements just got transformed from meeting in somebody's home, or a restaurant, to some other arrangement, because there were eight or ten of us who wanted to participate. Nobody stopped us. We just came over to those meetings.

DeMars: Oh, you mean talking about your group.

Kent: Yes, to your group. Age group. And then they were just together. There was absolutely no discrimination. It was really sweet, I think, from our point of view. We were accepted, inexperienced though we were.

Riess: Did you drink wine and have cheese and all?

Kent: Damned if I know. We took care of the amenities, I'm damn sure of that. But I don't remember.

Riess: I've noticed that there were no women in the early group.

DeMars: Well, yes, Ruth Jaffe.

Kent: Frannie Yeazell.

DeMars: Frannie Yeazell was Mrs. Spangle.

Kent: Well, Emmy Lou was around off and on.

DeMars: Yes, I guess she--. I was wondering, is Emmy Lou a card-carrying--?

Kent: I think she probably was.

DeMars: Yes. Maybe still is. [laughter]

Riess: On this list I showed you of members, and the order in which they entered the discussions, we definitely don't have Ruth Jaffe, and we don't have Frannie Yeazell. It's an all-boy thing up through the first twenty-two people.

DeMars: I think partially because--let me see, why would that be? Certainly, I don't think Jaffe was in Farm Security.

Kent: She was a landscape architecture student.

DeMars: Yes. But probably by the time we got around to the exhibit, all hands that were available would be welcome, weren't they, to help out?

Kent: Yes. But that was--Emmy Lou was not that kind of a co-worker, and Frannie--what was Frannie's background?

DeMars: I don't know.

Kent: It's somewhere in there. But she had standing, as far as I was concerned. She wasn't just going to be a nigger.

DeMars: Oh, yes.

Riess: [laughs] That's gutsy of you to use that word; here it concerns whether someone had standing or not?

- Kent: Yes. I mean, she had a professional field and discipline, and a political point of view, and a presence. No question about it.
- Riess: I was thinking that at some point in putting together the exhibit, that some things that women knew--
- Kent: Are not in there.
- Riess: --that you might have needed, the home economics touch?
- Kent: Oh, there's no question, yes, but they weren't there.
- Riess: Maybe that's because the model, for the group like Friends of Modern Architecture, was a man's group?
- Kent: That's true, there were not many women in the European scene. We didn't automatically talk with them.
- DeMars: I'm trying to think in FSA, too, whether--of course, the so-called county agents that were already an institution in the country, that were in contact with people in the camps, and so forth, there were quite a number of women in the Farm Security office, and I think we got some feedback from them about how things were working and what they needed maybe.
- Kent: I had a couple of experiences. Leonore Russell, Leonore Upham, was a student in art, but she became a member of our architecture group. She always was involved with Telesis and with San Francisco city planning, and she still practices her art. And then, also, Helen Meiklejohn, and of course the arrival of Catherine Bauer in '38, the year I was away, and then she stayed on. So right off the bat--.
- DeMars: Did she stay on, or come back and forth?
- Kent: She stayed on for another full year as a teacher, and then she didn't go back to live. Just went on and met and married Bill.
- Riess: So, you may have a notion that there were some women involved, but they sure don't appear.
- DeMars: Yes. But again, they're not involved as much. For instance, I was on the San Francisco AIA board for a year's term, and it was quite evident, the number of women in architecture now.
- Kent: That's now.

DeMars: Yes. But I mean, it's built up. I don't think there was organized resistance to it, it's just simply there weren't that many who went to architecture school.

Kent: There was unorganized resistance.

DeMars: Yes, I guess--well, yes, in a way.

Kent: Much more effective.

DeMars: You know the story with Julia Morgan was that John Galen--she was working for Howard in his office, and he was boasting to some friends, he said, "I have a brilliant designer in my office, she's a woman. Since she's a woman, I don't have to pay her very much," or something. Something like that. This story got back to her, and she quit.

Riess: Where did you hear that?

DeMars: It might have been in Eminent Women of the West. Do you know that one?

Riess: Yes, Eleanor Ritchie.

Kent: Well, I want to continue to strike a blow for our desire to have women in there. Both Helen Meiklejohn and Dorothy Erskine, although they were sort of a generation older--Helen's younger--they were independent operators in their own ways completely. Did you know Helen Meiklejohn at all?

DeMars: No.

Kent: She was an economist, and of course the second wife for Alex, and much younger. Dorothy Erskine and Peggy [Margaret Calder] Hayes were the same class, I think, class of '17. There was a big suffragette time then. And there was a whole generation that preceded our entry into active working life, that had been much freer to do things--the women. It was taken for granted on the part of some people, some men, that this ought to happen and would happen somehow, and so we were wanting it to happen, but we didn't quite know how to make it happen. There ought to be more women--.

DeMars: In decision-making and the operational fabric of things.

Kent: The Marin County planning director, after I left Marin County, was a woman for twenty-five years. She's around. Mary Summers. Mary Gilkie, and then she had another marriage, Mary Summers.

Riess: Was this a homogeneous group? You all were comfortable with one another?

Kent: Amazingly so, just amazingly so.

DeMars: And remember, we got some journalists in, and weren't there a couple of attorneys? And who else?

Kent: Engineers, a couple of engineers.

Riess: If there were people who were not comfortable, did they appear on the list and then disappear? There are any number of people who were there and then were not there any longer.

Kent: They might have faded away, but I don't know that--whether they were uncomfortable or not, we don't know.

DeMars: Yes. We didn't have any dues, did we?

Kent: I don't think so.

DeMars: They could come or not, and it was--yes.

Riess: There's one Japanese, Alfred Sawahata?

Kent: Yes, I knew him. He was my class.

Riess: And then there's a Yuasa.

Kent: Hachiro Yuasa.

DeMars: Who later on became the architect for the Co-op in Berkeley.

Kent: Yuasa was a marvelous watercolorist.

DeMars: There was another Japanese in our Farm Security office whose name I can't dredge up, who was quite competent, too. And of course, they all were--Hachi was the one who specifically was project architect for the houses which we were doing.

VI TELESIS DEVELOPS

[Interview 6: February 17, 1989]##

The Exhibition's Roots

Riess: Do you recall the decision to do a Telesis exhibition? At first, you were just a group of like-minded guys talking about what you were talking about. When did it become apparent that an exhibition was the way to carry your ideas to the public?

DeMars: I noticed in that piece of Fran Violich's, he mentions that Grace Morley of the museum [San Francisco Museum of Art] had proposed that if we would do an exhibit, and do it well, well-designed and up to the standards of exhibition technique, equal to the more sophisticated role that we think planning and architecture should have, that she would give us the entire south gallery to do this in. I don't know whether that was a result of somebody that knew Morley going and saying that we were thinking of doing an exhibition. I'm trying to think--I'm sure that I must have shown this book to Burt Cairns and the other guys in these discussions that were going on in those months from October of '38 to August of '39. We probably were kicking things back and forth.

The book is Des Canons, des Munitions? Merci! Des Logis S.V.P., and my French isn't up to the Parisian standards. It means "Cannons, Munitions? Thank You, We'll have Housing, If You Please." I think that's the intention. [Editions del'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1938]

Riess: Tell more about this book.

DeMars: The book is by Corbusier. He was a member of the CIAM, Congres Internacionaux d'Architecture Moderne, which was already a going outfit [founded 1928 in Switzerland]. We met some of the people in England when we came through on that trip in '38; there it was called the MARS group. So CIAM was an organization, an international one, but they'd already met--and it's often referred

to--they met in Athens to draw up their credo and so forth, and decided to do an exhibition during the Paris fair of 1937.

Riess: And the book's title means?

DeMars: Just in general, that governments instead of spending their money on cannons and munitions, what we really needed was housing. "Would you rather have war?" "Preferes-tu faire la guerre?"

Riess: The point of view is quite political. In Telesis, though, that was not the juxtaposition, was it?

DeMars: Well, no, it wasn't. That's true, it was not. And I think we sort of just skipped over that. You don't need that excuse, or the alternative. They approached the entire environment. That was the part that appealed to us.

Riess: You said the book has the same four divisions that the show had.

DeMars: They tackled first living, and then the working environment, and then the recreational needs and so forth of people, and finally all the kinds of services that knitted these together, the rest of the man-made environment is that. I would say that. I think the word man-made environment wasn't one that was used at that time, but the word environment, of course, was a reasonably common word. We were using it.

Riess: Did you talk to the CIAM people?

DeMars: We never did. Well, we met individuals and so forth, and in fact the eastern architects that we met wanted us to make this a chapter of CIAM, you see, which I imagine they must have had at Harvard.

Riess: Did CIAM achieve any of its goals? After all, Europe was instantly plunged into war. Did this just disappear into the archives?

DeMars: Well, no. The point is that this had been going--this must have arisen out of the twenties, I would imagine, or early thirties.

Riess: The group itself.

DeMars: Yes. Because housing was still a problem in Germany and other places after the destruction of World War I. And modern architecture was just beginning to be accepted. When did Corbusier do the Villa Savoye? I think it was in the mid-twenties, wasn't it? [1929-1931]

The new architecture was cheaper to do than the old one. And of course, in a sense, this is almost Tom Wolfe's argument of where it all came from, which is true and it's not true. [From Bauhaus to Our House, by Tom Wolfe, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981.] It was part also of a totally different philosophy, and it certainly was happening to us here with Wurster and Gardner Dailey and other such people.

Riess: What's the philosophy you're talking about?

DeMars: A simplicity of elements, form following function, and in a sense the irrelevance of attempting to continue to reproduce classic architecture and classic form when you really couldn't use that kind of building construction, or build the kind of buildings we needed, and maintain, you might say, the fancy-dress clothes of earlier times.

Riess: Okay. Well, then, to get back to the initial question, I think what you're saying is that as you began to talk, even before Telesis, before these people began to meet as a group, that when you were talking, you were talking about things you had seen, and that this is how a vision is communicated. It has to be visible to people. Thus, an exhibition.

DeMars: True, yes.

And you see, for instance, Catherine Wurster, Catherine Bauer, had already written this book Modern Housing, which was about housing in Europe. And other than being able to mention these few pioneering things in New York and so forth, you might say socially-motivated housing, not necessarily for the lowest income group, but a kind of thing where you plan a whole block or bigger pieces of land--. I think Radburn had been done by this time, which was a development. That was not a high-density inner city thing, but it was an attempt to carry on the garden city discoveries and movements. One could see that there was a need for this kind of housing here.

Riess: But the rest of the people who were your core group in Telesis were not necessarily looking at all of this as a problem of housing, I would bet.

DeMars: Housing was one quarter of the exhibit, but several of us who had been to Europe could see that particular problem being approached in this totally new way. Catherine Bauer and Lewis Mumford and others were writing about these planned developments.

Riess: Okay, so Grace Morley was making the space available.

DeMars: Maybe we said after a while that we ought to do the same kind of thing they did in Paris, have an exhibit of this.

Did I mention the fact that Corbu wanted to have this built while the fair was there? [Paris Exposition, 1937] They wouldn't let him do it where the fair was, and he had to build it in the outskirts of Paris, and they did it in a tent. He designed the tent, of course, so that's part of the book. And then, as it took up these different sections, we must have thought here is, in a sense, the framework for what we're talking about. I must have given this to Walter Landor, saying, "This is basically the kind of approach we want to take, but with our own examples."

Riess: The text for the catalogue and the wording of the exhibition panels, was that a committee effort, or was there one person?

DeMars: Must have been someone. Could have been Eckbo. I'm sure that I must have sat in as it was developed, how it was going to be divided up and so forth. The thing I did do was these sketches.

Riess: You're talking about the group of contrasting sketched illustrations of what is, and what might be, that are included in that California Living article.

DeMars: Yes. There was a long exhibit panel with the examples. In housing there were examples, mostly European, but maybe a couple of things locally. We were trying to bring it back, good examples of an architecture treatment. It might have been a Wurster house that we thought was reasonably appealing to the public--some of them might not be. We were aware that everyone didn't necessarily go for modern architecture. It had to have some human sympathy. But this big panel was maybe fifteen, sixteen feet long.

[looking at illustrations] There was a kind of introduction to the three sections. Then here was the panel that had large photos, blown up, all about--well, that says "Work," so that must be the ending of the housing thing. And then it looked here as though each of these was going to be a different kind of panel, but as it turned out, these were almost identical panels, and each time, after they'd seen the examples, then at the end were my sketches, and they were a summary of what you'd been looking at. "Here's the way it is now, here's the way it could be." I think they use that very terminology. It was rather a simplified summary of what they'd just been seeing, and why we were showing all this stuff.

Riess: How were the various jobs delegated? I'm curious about the mechanics of this. Did they decide that you were the best with sketching?

DeMars: Well, maybe I volunteered to do it, if it was with that small group. I had a full-time job in Farm Security and was very busy but this was something I could take home with me. In fact, I was thought to be someone with a graphic skill of sorts.

Later on I didn't hesitate for a moment when we were doing the competition for the Student Center, that Don Reay would do the four sketches that were required, because I liked his particular twist. He had a very nice, professional look that I felt my stuff didn't. His drawing of figures and all that had a light-hearted look. I think they contributed a great deal. And they were quite big drawings, on thirty by forty inch illustration board. For Telesis, that panel at the end I think was only about four feet wide and five feet high.

My sketches were only part of this panel. They were photostats of these drawings I am showing you, I'd say nine inches by fifteen. We used the black negative prints for the bad conditions and the white positives for the look of the future. One of the perversities of the arts in these times--and maybe in others--is that the bad conditions were more fun to draw--and maybe more interesting graphically. Anyway these end panels all had the same layout of text and illustrations.

Riess: The plan was to have the two drawings.

DeMars: The two drawings, and some statement that you'd seen these examples of slums, and then this part showed examples of good planning.

Riess: In a July 1940 Sunset Magazine article about building materials in "space for living," Walter Landor and F.J. McCarthy--identified as "of Telesis"--chose an interesting group of architects' work as illustrations--Dailey, Wurster, Neutra, Mayhew among them.

DeMars: These don't look very startling to us now, but they were sort of off-beat then.

Riess: Were these examples that were actually in the exhibit?

DeMars: No, I don't think so. I think Sunset, and possibly Landor and McCarthy wanted to show things that were local so that people could relate to them directly. We would have taken a little bit more startling examples. My recollection is that the Doldertal flats where we met Alfred Roth were one of the examples we showed, because it had balconies, and all this kind of thing. For an apartment house, it looked like a damn pleasant place to live.

Riess: And you were not interested in single-family dwellings.

DeMars: We didn't consider that the big problem was the single-family house. We didn't think everybody had to have a single-family house.

Riess: Now, do you remember when Landor was introduced to the group, and what his job was to be?

DeMars: He was brought by Fran and was interested in this group. He was an industrial designer.

Riess: And he was out of work?

DeMars: Well, he had just come from England. He's from England.

Riess: He says himself that the group was "determined to prepare a dramatic exhibit on a new environment... My job was that of coordinator."¹ I thought that odd for someone who was late in the game to be coordinator.

DeMars: Well, in a sense, yes. I think he--he didn't want to say, "I designed the exhibit."

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DeMars: Grace Morley had said, "If you'll do a first-class exhibit that we consider up to the standards of the museum--." And so when he became available, and we learned that he was an industrial designer, it seemed logical to say, "Well, let's put this together." But I'm sure that a lot of the material that went into it and so forth was picked by others. We must have helped gather the shots. In fact, we being architects would want to show those parts, and the planners, among them Jack Kent, would have been talking about some of the service things that they were showing. We had a really good choice of people involved in different kinds of things, so that we could choose. "You do this," or maybe someone volunteered, "I'll do this."

The Big Picture

Riess: In Fran Violich's Telesis archive was this interesting piece of paper with your name on it. Did you write it, and what are all of those initials?

DeMars: That isn't my handwriting, the DeMars. [pause] S.R.M.E.N., and they're with dots after them. C.M.E.R.S. This is the

¹San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle, California Living,
February 26, 1978, p. 35.

organizational structure of the D.N.E. Designers of the New Environment? [laughs] B.E.R.S., C.E.R.S. Let me see if there's anything else here.

Riess: I thought that this perhaps was in your struggle to find a name for the group.

DeMars: I think it was. I remember that one of the names proposed was Focus, which was the name of the magazine which the British MARS group did, the Modern Architecture Research Society. But Focus had to be eliminated as the name because at that time, in the ads, there was a great campaign against imported Cuban cigars, which were stuck together by mucus--in other words, by spit; they licked them to do it--so the ads said, "Do you want mucus on the end of your cigar?" And we thought, "Focus is too close to that. We can't--" [laughs] Whereas Focus is a perfectly good name, but this other was so common, it would be in jokes, and stand-up comedians would use it. It was a national campaign.

Riess: I've seen a reference somewhere to your meeting with Jose Sert and Marcel Breuer to talk about starting a branch of Telesis.

DeMars: Oh, yes. Whatever that period was, I was in the East at the time, and there was a meeting. I think we were in New York, and it may have been some convention or some housing thing, or something that I was there for anyway, and I was still involved in Telesis. There was Breuer and Sert, and I'm trying to think--I don't think Gropius was there, but I knew him at the time--and two or three other prominent architects.

The issue had come up about Telesis, and I think they were members of CIAM, and I don't know whether the idea was to have it become a branch of CIAM called Telesis, as the London group was called MARS and the one in Zurich, the Friends of Modern Architecture, or that their group would simply be a branch of Telesis themselves instead of CIAM or whatever since their goals were really quite similar.

I corresponded with the group out here, and I must have been due back West soon after that meeting since I waited till I got back for an answer. Well, they just weren't sure those guys in the East could be trusted. As it was pointed out earlier, we almost found ourselves wanting to restrict Telesis to the Bay Area. We were not trying to change society, that was not our priority. We wanted to change the environment in our own particular part of the country, and we knew it was possible because we'd seen examples elsewhere. Desirable social or political change would evolve as needed.

I think we were aware that our purpose was counter to the Marxist line. What we're talking about is simply counter-revolutionary. It's slowing down the big day. I think we did have some in there of this active group, young Turks and all that, that sort of felt just they were the ones to head the revolution, and let's not spoil it before we get there. I had a little of that feeling with some of the people in our information division in the Farm Security. I think it may even be documented, that they were probably card-carrying members.

Riess: So they'd rather see the situation blow up?

DeMars: Yes. If you ameliorate things it just slows down the date when you can get the real solution. The information division had plenty of ditch bank situations, Associated Farmers, union-busting and all this, to keep them quite busy completely. They seldom if ever showed material on the camps and other programs or the housing that FSA was actually building.

Telesis East didn't happen, but Telesis South [Southern California] did. I don't recall being aware of it at the time. I may have already gone East. I learned later that Mel Scott had helped put together a group in Los Angeles that produced an exhibition down there. There was enough publicity on that to persuade Jack Hilmer and Warren Callister to leave Texas for Los Angeles to work as draftsmen in the airplane industry and also be part of Telesis there.

Riess: "Planning for people." How did you know who the people were that you were planning for? You were telling me over tea about Frank Thompson's comment. Maybe you should tell that story, on that theme of the grand notion.

DeMars: Yes. When we were still on Mission Street--that was the second locale of the Farm Security--there had already been a little bit of, I suppose, the word spreading that we were hiring architects and so forth. We had a young man, probably fresh out of school in this particular instance, who came in, and he wanted to work for us, because we were doing something beyond your everyday problems, doing these large-scale things, "dealing with broad social problems and so forth." That's what he wanted to get into. He was probably a graduate from Berkeley, and he just didn't want to go out and do a little house for anybody--probably hadn't been asked to yet, anyway. But he wanted to get involved in bigger things than that, in a grand, big scale.

Our office was not even separated particularly from the drafting room, in which there were six people, I think, at the time. You could pretty much hear everything going on nearby.

Frank Thompson was one of the draftsmen, and his job had been writing specifications for the first of the farm labor homes, the little two-bedroom houses we were doing for farm workers with more permanent employment or good prospect of work. Our budgets were very, very low on all this, and Frank was always trying to find the cheaper thing, that was his job.

He came walking in after this young man had left and said, "I'd like to be involved in some of the broader aspects, too. But what am I doing? I'm spending my time picking the cheapest screen door catch we can get, and cheaper cabinet hinges for the kitchen cabinets." And so on. So we were all amused at that. I had to reassure him that his job was very important. [laughs]

Riess: And when you were putting the exhibition together, you were really dealing with the broad aspects.

DeMars: It didn't seem to us that difficult to say, "Wouldn't it be common sense to plan things a little, when you know that there are problems?" We felt that we knew some of the things to be done. We'd seen it happening in Europe, where they took a large piece of land and laid the streets out in a more economical way, innovative site planning. There are whole sections of literature on the garden cities, cutting down on the costs of development, so that ordinary people could have housing.

One of the things you had to do is, instead of having endless streets in all directions of a width that might be available for whatever might happen in the future, which is sort of the way towns had been laid out in the U.S., in a garden city or a new town a residential street can be much narrower. It can be a cul-de-sac. It doesn't have to go on through. It can be a little loop to discourage through traffic. These were all things we felt were known and used elsewhere. Why weren't we doing them in this country? Why didn't you see it in San Francisco? Why didn't anyone other than a speculative builder build houses for people?

I think this was sort of it. The knowledge is out there; this is what we were trying to show. Other places had been doing it, even, and we go on not being able to provide it. And when you get into utilities and so forth, if you have certain other plans, you can reduce the extent and hence the cost of utilities.

In our Farm Security work, Garrett Eckbo got very much into how we can cut down on the length of streets. In most of our Farm Security things, we had no telephone poles around in the project, or very few. There would be a couple of main ones, and then we'd pick up and string the wires from house to house. You don't see them looming up. In Chandler, and the things we did in Arizona, I

don't know whether--we may even have gotten underground in some cases, but I suspect the initial pole would be out on the street someplace, and then from then on we tried to loop around, building to building. Well, this usually violates local codes.

Riess: That's right, and you were in on the decision-making process there in a way that you wouldn't be in a big city. You could have a vision, and you had some control over political part.

DeMars: The ordinances that I'm talking about, like street widths--that's a detail of actual planning when you have a group who are involved in that, and in our Farm Security work we were. We realized that in city ordinances this was already set, but those are not unchangeable. And of course, when it got around later on to large areas being developed for housing, then you had different street systems very often which began to address themselves to possible cost-savings by how utilities were distributed, and so on.

But at that point, we weren't just saying that this is the most important thing. We just felt that the initial thing was planning, and that the activity of planning had to be more rationally looked at, in contrast to the typical surveyor who, when you wanted to do a subdivision, you get a fellow to lay out the streets for you.

Riess: For the people walking through the show, it seems to me it was a consciousness-raising experience. Because what could they do?

DeMars: Yes, but we were, I think as Fran pointed out in his article, right across the street from the city hall, and we did get all the supervisors to come over there. We got them to realize that a city of San Francisco's scope couldn't conceivably go on lacking a real master plan for all the problems of the city, and they couldn't do that with a planning office consisting of three people. And that was the first kind of step that needed to be taken. Planning in the city was considered a little bit like garbage disposal, or one of the other little things. You had to have an office that agreed whether there would be a fourth gas station on this corner or not, and they usually did.

San Francisco Planning and Housing Association

Riess: Here's a list of the members of the board of the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association.

DeMars: [laughs] Vernon DeMars starting it off.

Riess: What did you get done there?

DeMars: [reading list] Michael Goodman, Morgan Gunst, [Marion Biers] Howden, Langley Porter--yes. I must have attended some meetings with them.

The word "planning" was not in it at first. I think it was San Francisco Housing Association at first. When those of us from Telesis got into it they changed the name, because really the emphasis was more on planning.

Riess: This group got together to lobby the city of San Francisco?

DeMars: I think so, yes, a kind of a pressure group, lobby group. I don't know whether for their specific mission they spelled out whether to get more housing for lower income people, or what, or how much farther back it went before this particular time. I think it had been going on for a while. Catherine Bauer's in here, too.

Riess: Let's see how many of the Telesis group are on the Planning and Housing Association Board: there's Vernon DeMars, Martha Gerbode, Michael Goodman, Morgan Gunst, Harry Hilp--tell me if any of these people are architects or planners.

DeMars: Yes. Harry Hilp was something-and-Hilp Construction Company, Barrett and Hilp I think, one of the big-time construction firms in the city.

Riess: Marion Biers Howden?

DeMars: Yes. Now, she a little later on was a secretary for [thinking]--Cyril Magnin, that's it!

Riess: Dr. Langley Porter, that's interesting.

DeMars: Langley Porter Clinic was later.

Riess: Dorothy Liebes.

DeMars: Dorothy Liebes was a designer, an interior designer for the classy--she did work on a number of Bill Wurster's houses.

Howden--he probably isn't on it. It seems to me that when this outfit ended up as SPUR finally, he was one of the first executive directors for it.

Riess: Mr. Howden?

DeMars: Mr. Howden, a young fellow, as many of us were in those days.
[laughter]

Riess: And F. J. McCarthy?

DeMars: McCarthy was an architect, and in Telesis from the beginning.

Riess: Catherine Bauer, Jack Kent, Mel Scott.

DeMars: Mel Scott was a city planner and author of an important planning book, and his wife Gerry Scott was a landscape architect and activist on many issues.

Riess: Ernest Born, he was an architect.

Helen Bridge?

DeMars: Bridge? That doesn't strike me.

Riess: Germaine Bulke is from the labor movement.

S. Waldo Coleman? And Jerd Sullivan?

DeMars: Jerd Sullivan was an active public citizen. He was the head of the Bank of America, in the 1950s he was president. Good friend of Bill Wurster's.

Riess: He had a garden designed by Thomas Church.

You and Jack Kent were the Telesis members of it, and McCarthy too.

DeMars: Yes. And McCarthy was a very active and activist part of Telesis.

Different Emphases in Membership, and Working Collectively

Riess: I notice that the Telesis members working on the exhibition were divided into two groups. You were part of the Form, Content, and Financing group, which included DeMars, Eckbo, Joseph, and Landor. The other group was the Economy, Social, and Political group, and that was Cairns, Kent, and Violich. I wondered whether those two groups already represented quite different camps and philosophies.

DeMars: Oh, no, I wouldn't say that. Cairns--I'm sure if he had lived, he would have had a very important position in politics. And I think he would have gone on with the physical things as well.

Riess: So that group would be the activists, or something like that?

DeMars: He was quite an activist, and rather a philosopher about some of this. I remember one time a discussion of "Are these Okies showing any appreciation of what we've been doing for them?" or something, and Burt sort of said, "Now, listen to this. Whether they do or don't is not the question here. We know it ought to be done. We know it's better than what they've had, we know it's the right thing to be doing. Don't expect any thanks for it necessarily." I think he was better read than I was on these kinds of things.

I think it was just simply a division of labor. Those of us specifically and obviously more oriented to physical solutions, well everybody couldn't just do everything. Obviously Kent is very much an activist and would have been interested in the politics. I was not disinterested, but I was more interested and had more to contribute in stuff I'd been deeply involved in. I considered myself a bit of an activist, and still do, at least about my prime concern at the time.

Riess: So, of Form, Content, and Financing, form and content were yours. You weren't involved with the financing, were you?

DeMars: No. I didn't get involved in the financing. That was probably McCarthy, who had wide contacts in the San Francisco business community.

Landor designed the show and layout. I'm sure we all reviewed and collaborated on major decisions and general directions, but we had a limited time to plan, build, and put the show together for an opening on a very definite date. I don't recall how long it took. Fran's records probably show it.

Riess: The activists and non-activists in Telesis seems to be what Corwin Mocine's letter to Garrett Eckbo is all about. I gave you a copy of that.² Mocine wrote about the conflict between those who were interested in what was said, and those who were interested in how it was said. That, in a way, is the same dichotomy I see between the form and content people and the political and economic people. He said that because of this conflict, between those who were interested in what was said and those who were interested in how it was said, there was a certain weakness in the actual show itself. I wonder whether you can put yourself back in that time and remember what this is really referring to.

²See Appendices.

DeMars: I don't remember any significant disagreements among those of us listed as responsible for getting the exhibit done, including the activists. Eckbo on the Form and Content team was also one of the most articulate and outspoken activists on Telesis. Hence Mocine's letter. There were probably more differences of opinion aired in meetings at the general membership, since that was the meetings' purpose.

I didn't know there was a felt weakness about the show. I think there was a kind of weakness in the first exhibit. I thought the summary, simply showing a city plan of San Francisco, which I think is the way they sort of did it, as just a physical thing, and done as a kind of artsy three-dimensional piece of sculpture--I think we had [Antonio] Sotomayor doing these little figures in copper--I wasn't against that, but I didn't know whether that really told what it was we were mostly talking about, or whether that would have convinced anybody that that's what was needed to be done.

But I guess the first exhibit, the one done by Telesis people themselves, must have been effective, because it got some results. When the second exhibit came along a couple of years later with a mostly new membership, they got the money from someplace, and hired professionals to do the exhibit. I think the third one (postwar I think) was the same way. And so here the people that were putting it together were most concerned with how it looked, and my reaction to it was a little bit--they were trying to be too jazzy and too "modern." They would have a great huge photo blown up of a mass of people, which you could take of the top of the heads of people in a stadium or something, "the next two million people." Well, okay, and you do this on a telly program or something. But I thought it took up an awful lot of room in the exhibit to make that point.

I often feel that way in movies or documentaries, that some of the professionals that put together such things are--well, in the movies they've had their finger on the pulse of entertainment, or eye-capturing and all this, and I suppose they've had experience. You have to assume they do. But sometimes I've felt, "Okay, okay, I get the point." You're taking up a lot of room or time to make that point, but this is speaking to a lot of people.

I suppose in my sketches I showed as well as I could what I thought people would agree was a bad scene, in each case. Whether they would agree with my vision of the future--I don't even agree with it now particularly. But at least then it would have looked in great contrast to the bad scene.

Riess: You're saying that there wasn't really a conflict in putting on the first Telesis exhibition?

DeMars: Yes, or I may not have been aware of it. Again, some of the architects in the outside probably were using some of their own time, I mean professional time--they had offices and were working--and McCarthy was, I think, self-employed, and a couple of the others. They probably used good chunks of that time working on parts of this. I was not in a position to really do that.

Riess: Serge Chermayoff, who made some comments on the Telesis show in Pencil Points magazine [July 1942], called it "a movement towards architectural cooperation and away from competition." I wondered if you thought that that was borne out in fact.

DeMars: I think the situation now, it's both. Architects are in competition, but I think they're quite capable of working together --I think the AIA now has some committees working locally. And they'll have these conventions and things. Behind the scenes, and the other side of their character, they have to get the next job, and if they get it, they get it away from somebody else, probably. So that goes on, but I think they also have a broader interest in their art, and in the cause, and all the aspects of it. They can be quite cooperative. It could be that at that time Chermayoff's own experiences had been a little bit more cutthroat or something.

Riess: This was a theme in the very first issue of Task that I looked at, that architects should start working more collectively. And then a later issue, about a year or two later, talked about examples of where they were functioning as members of a team. Farm Security and TVA were examples of that. So it seemed to be an issue.

DeMars: Well, I think the circumstances in both of those examples explain the difference of approach. The FSA and the TVA had the other environmentally-involved professions right there working together. In the other case an architect has a job, he carries it to a certain point, then the landscape architect is brought in at the end to do his part. The engineer is only--I mean, you pick an engineer, and it's all designed, but the engineer sort of takes on to sort of certify that's it--.

I'm making this worse than it really is, because any big jobs these days, the engineer is brought in early on, because his decisions may change what you have to do, and you don't want to get too far until you find out if certain things can work. In our case in the FSA, we had all the different people who would be involved in the final product right there in this one office: the surveyors, who went out and surveyed it, who then laid out from our plans what we were going to do.

This is where we learned that the surveyors find it difficult to lay out a circle on a big scale. We'd think you do it with a string--they do it with a transit. They can run a straight line and have a little curved piece and have another straight line, and another curved piece. But a constant thing is difficult for them to do. Well, that's what we learned. I'm sure now you've seen many subdivisions with curved streets, and so on. But apparently it's a little more expensive, even a little more difficult to build.

Fran's collection of attendance records and articles about Telesis and the exhibit in newspapers and magazines of that period are rather amazing in retrospect. All elements of the "man-made environment" have been given so much attention in recent years that concerns of our group then are now taken for granted. But Telesis seems to have been almost the first thing of its kind to get so much attention, and to have had so much direct impact on what has happened in the Bay Area since. Whole classes from both high and elementary schools were brought to the exhibit, so another generation was already learning the meaning of TELESIS: "Progress intelligently planned and directed."

Before we leave this subject of Telesis, there were a couple of interesting incidents during construction of the exhibition in an empty store on Clay Street, I think it was:

Emmy Lou Packard, Walter Packard's daughter, now married to Burt Cairns, had studied with Diego Rivera when the family was living in Mexico. Rivera was in San Francisco and working on his great fresco at the 1939 fair on Treasure Island, and Emmy Lou was working with him as an assistant. One day she brought Rivera in to see progress on our exhibition. I recall he was delighted to see our concern for social problems, and apparently doing a piece of propaganda he could identify with.

The second incident was the visit of Rexford Tugwell. He was now a private consultant, but still a big name. He had come to San Francisco to speak to the Commonwealth Club, and someone brought him down to see progress on the exhibition. I think he was properly impressed. When he was leaving he said, "Well, you're on the right track, keep at it. The ones running things now are going to die off and then you'll be in charge!"

An Interprofessional Center Proposed, to Include Engineers##

Riess: In an interview with David Streatfield, Fran Violich said,

"We began talking about what we were going to do. Most of us felt we should work with the present set-up, while others said we should reorganize the whole of society and do it from an underground basis. For a while, we had a proposal before us to set up an interprofessional center in downtown San Francisco, and indeed we had in mind the old French Consulate on Jackson Street, that marvelous building on the north side of the street with the brick arches. This was long before those abandoned buildings became Jackson Square.

"Joe McCarthy was pushing this, since he felt that if we could get the engineers, the landscape architects, the AIA to have headquarters there, we could begin to bring together the professions. That would have been one basic way to influence the interdisciplinary nature of the environmental professions...in any case, it would have been a great thing to have brought those four professions together into a single building. At any rate, this great idea never got off the ground. Then we finally settled on the notion of an exhibit."

DeMars: Yes. I'd forgotten that. Now it begins to sort of tinkle, coming back there. I must have known about it, and then been involved in it, and been in favor of it, because it was one of the conclusions from our Farm Security experience.

Roland Wank, wasn't that the name of the architect who had really so much influence on the TVA dams and their environment? This was made quite a point of in the Museum of Modern Art, that here is a situation where the dam, one of the great TVA dams, is a work of architecture, not merely a work of engineering. There, in a sense, you had an architect in a strong enough position to not be thought of as the exterior decorator after the fact that the engineers had decided the form. It was obviously a case of collaboration, because it's a fine piece of engineering, but the

way it's--he must have had a definite hand in the materials used, and how they were expressed, and so forth.

And a little later--let's see, when was the Bay Bridge done? The Golden Gate Bridge was 1937, so I guess the Bay Bridge was done in 1936. But my point was that each bridge had an architect. I've forgotten who was consulting architect for the Golden Gate. Joseph Strauss, of course, was the engineer, and a most creative one in conceiving and carrying out the detailed design of the longest suspension bridge in the world up to that time. But the towers lent themselves to expressive, aesthetic considerations for which there might be alternative, equally effective engineering solutions.

This is born out by the wholly different interpretation of the Bay Bridge where the consulting architect was Timothy Pflueger. He was the one who proposed this sort of entasis on the columns. The actual columns of the bridge that make the towers have a curve. They don't bulge out. The classic column typically doesn't just taper up to the top. It goes up straight for about a third of the height, and then the diameter tapers in a subtle curve that makes the transition until it gets to the smaller diameter at the top, and that's called entasis. The swelling should be almost unnoticeable, only enough that the column doesn't seem top-heavy. However, some columns actually do bulge noticeably. The Corinthian column the Romans used started a little smaller at the bottom, bulged out a little, and then came in. The columns on the facade of St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco do that to almost a disturbing extent.

On both bridges the towers were going to be bigger at the base than at the top. The engineers did that on the Golden Gate Bridge by stepping in. I'm sure the architect was involved in that. On the Bay Bridge Pflueger convinced them that they should do it in a long, gentle curve, so that it doesn't just go like this, and it doesn't bulge out. It is a constant narrowing curve, as it goes up, and it may even straighten out for the last part. It might be even called reverse entasis, because unlike the stresses in a stone column, the steel towers need a wider base for fixed attachments to the foundation, so the profile curves inward as the towers rise. And then the treatment of the big "X"s. Those are doing exactly the same as on the Golden Gate Bridge, but Pflueger felt that you should express the engineering; its connection and all would be part of a modern architect's way of designing that tower. "We'll accept the braces."

On the Golden Gate Bridge, they were trying to make it more of a work of architecture, so the bridge seems to have several panels spanning the two legs of the column. Well, inside those

panels there's trusswork that criss-crosses, which under other circumstances could either have been left--the outside could have been left off. There's a lot of architectural treatment in steel plates to cover the business of the trusswork, all of which I'm glad is there now, because I think it does become a work of architecture and engineering. At that time, I was kind of more of a purist, and I thought that the Bay Bridge was a more direct expression, and yet beautifully done.

I don't think San Francisco got this from Telesis, but somehow or other I think San Francisco simply felt that these were important enough structures that maybe an architect ought to be involved in some of the aesthetic decisions.

War Housing, and Developments in Prefabrication

Riess: I think we should cover war housing now. One of the ways war housing is interesting is that very big name architects, like Neutra, got involved.

DeMars: And in the East, they were all of the top names. I think Breuer did some war housing. Carl Koch did some, even Saarinen and Louis Kahn.

Riess: And Wurster did some out here, too.

DeMars: Wurster did it out here, and Henry Hill did a school for Wurster's family housing in Vallejo. All the Telesis members, when they were available, were involved in it.

One of the things that the government did before we were in the war, but when we were doing the shipbuilding and so forth, and whatever else, aircraft things, they felt that modern architects and the prominent names were already doing certain kinds of things, and instead of setting up a great bureaucracy, a central office in Washington that would design all this stuff, which is the typical government way to do where it's a big government program, they simply, where there were government agencies or even a private agency already doing certain kinds of things, they simply had them do it. They were already organized to do it, and they could find out the problem locally.

At the beginning of Farm Security, when we did things like Chandler, that is, row housing for families, there weren't any things like this at all, and yet that became almost--not that they were copying that--but down to its simple fundamentals, this is

what you did to get a row house, as cheap a dwelling as possible. Another one was Lou Kahn's large housing project outside of Baltimore.

Riess: So in this way, you just had a new title on the door? It was no longer Farm Security Administration, it was now War Housing?

DeMars: No, they didn't even bother--they didn't change the titles or anything. It was simply a project we did, and I think that--in other words, there weren't going to be any more camps built, probably. In fact, I know there weren't, because they were already running out of nails when we got to Vallejo. The next bunch of things that were being done, they were making hardware partially out of wood. It seemed kind of ridiculous. We'll get to another point in a moment here.

Riess: What was the first project you were involved in with war housing?

DeMars: Strangely enough, although we had never done dormitory facilities, they figured that our approach to tackling an emergency housing thing was such that we'd be a good one to do it. Wurster was already involved in building 1,700 units of family housing for workers that had families to be housed. Well, there were a lot of single family men who weren't taken care of, and they wanted dormitories for them. We were given the job of doing buildings for dormitories.

Wurster's family housing were all one-story, but joined, little row houses going up and down hills, on the hilly side, the west side, of this highway coming into Vallejo. They didn't have single party walls between them because these couldn't be standardized, with every house at a different elevation going up and down the hills. Each house was identical with its own complete outside walls. No windows on the two sides, of course, and the houses were set a couple of inches apart for sound insulation.

Wurster must have been told what they wanted, and he would put it together, and he'd design the site planning and so forth. But he felt that for the same amount of money, they could do a better thing. They allowed him--he must have talked them into this--to take a little section and build a couple of dozen. I think he had three models of a thing that they designed from scratch. One of them was two-story flats, with a little stairway and balcony, so in other words you could save land that way, instead of doing all one-story.

We must have been told roughly what they wanted out of us, too. Then, we simply designed it and put it together. We did

these two-story prefabricated plywood buildings, and these were made of stressed-skin panels. Time was of the essence. While we were planning them and laying them out and doing other parts of the job, the panels themselves were being built by lumberyards all around the Bay Area.

You couldn't have let out a contract for one to take on the contracting of the entire thing, building the panels and going through all this operation. They put together contracts for the materials. Then they had several contractors that would assemble them and so forth. So it was a real large-scale experiment in prefabrication of reasonably large parts.

All the wall panels were four-foot by eight-foot, because that's the most economic size that plywood comes in, and it was used without any further trimming or finishing. Of course, larger panels were needed for floors, ceilings, and roof, but these were also prefabricated. We were using the identical panel system that Wurster was using for family housing on one side of the valley. His were one-story family houses, of usually two bedrooms.

I remember we were pretty fascinated by the whole process. At the site you seldom heard a skill saw--everything was already cut and "prefabricated" for the most part. I watched one carpenter, assembling certain parts, tapping wedges into place, etc. At a certain pause in the operation, I asked him how he liked doing this compared with the usual kind of carpentry. He hardly looked up, but shrugged, in reply, "Work is work."

We were doing two-story buildings, about 150 feet long. We did a total for 3,000 single men, and we had about fifteen of these buildings. Thinking ahead to after the war, we thought here were all these things being done out of identical panels you could build family housing with. There'd be no need for dormitories after the war, so these could be reused for permanent family housing such as Wurster was doing right then across the highway. (Incidentally, there was no other weight-bearing structure. The first floor plywood panels carried the load of upper stories and roof.)

Our plan was that we could reuse these panels if we nailed them together with what are called scaffold nails. It's a double-headed nail, and carpenters use them where they have to get on a scaffolding and then they're going to tear it apart. There's a second head on it, so you can pull the nail out when you want to.

The panel system that both Wurster and the FSA were using on these units was developed, I think, in southern California. It was like a hollow-core door, no nails, very light. It was only, I think, three inches thick, with the equivalent of a one-by-three

inside. The prefabrication consists of having this sort of grid pattern the same. Many hollow-core doors are simply made that way, with some light material inside.

They had a stack of plywood piled up. They ran this core through a machine, a couple of rollers that put glue on both sides. The glue-covered core was lifted off, dropped on the stack, and two more pieces of plywood were placed on the top of the core, because that would be the top of this panel, and the bottom of the next one above it. They simply stacked up this pile of about a dozen panels--there was a thing that kept them in place--and this was already sitting on the base of a press on wheels. The top came down, they put the screws on, it rolled down, was stored. When they unrolled it, it was ready to go. It was almost like postage stamps, and it was an interesting process. We went and saw it then. I have pictures of that.

Well, anyway, the core of the panel is set back from the edges of the plywood, so it left a hollow space where the two panels came together. Into that space was dropped the heavy end of a long three-by-three that had been ripped down diagonally from one end to the other. Then you dropped in the other wedge-shaped piece.

When they were selling this system to make houses in southern California, you had glue on the two sides of the wedge, you dropped one piece in, then you dropped the second wedge in with the pointy end down, you tapped it into place and it squeezed the thing out against the edges of the panel, and the wall is fixed. You've got the two things joined. You do all this lying down on the floor; they weren't dropped in afterwards. You can see that the whole operation could be very speedy. The whole building would go up in a day or so. Then a little more time for wiring, etc.

In our case out here they still used the wedge, and it was tapped into place. Then we drove these scaffold nails in, through the two wedges. You can even see them in some of the pictures. It made a little dotty point down each side of the wall joints.

Knowing how this went together, after the war, when we were going to move-back to Berkeley and build a house, I had heard that they were getting ready to sell some of the war housing for re-use, and so on. Wow, good! So I corresponded with--I don't know who I corresponded with here--about it. This house that you're sitting in was planned to be built of those panels, and that's why I've even expressed it.

I left four-by-eight panels, you see, the wall back of you here? And then these are the identical windows we had designed for the dormitories, because there's no frame for the window. Can you see the post there between the windows? That's just the structural frame of the house. The typical way you do a window, you have the rough framed opening, and then you have to have a finish frame with sill to hold the sash and so forth, and that takes fitting. So then you have to put trim around the inside to cover up the cracks, and you need trim on the outside to keep water out, so you have all these extra parts.

Well, this is a type of sash that opens out like an awning with the operating hardware on the two sides, and it's all applied on the outside of the building. The sill, which doesn't fit into the opening, is simply nailed on the outside, and the window itself laps that, so water can't get in. The headpiece over the window is the identical sill piece, so that you can even stack these windows up vertically. When they run around lengthwise, instead of the side having to have a piece to put the hardware on, the hardware's mounted on the side of the next window which, of course, doesn't operate but is screwed onto the outside.

I rather liked, even aesthetically, the simplicity of it all. It was sort of in the thing of modern architecture: trim was one of the things you could get rid of. Of course, we didn't discover until later that then the cracks begin to show sometimes. But those cracks are done on purpose.

Riess: Now, what about these panels? These aren't from war housing?

DeMars: No.

Riess: Were you unable to get any of the panels?

DeMars: Right, they weren't available.

They used them for student housing in Davis, but not the way we had planned. I know one of the people who put them up there, a very good friend of ours, he arranged for it, and the way they moved them, they sawed the entire two-story building into four pieces, moved them onto a barge, and rafted them up the river, dragged them ashore in one piece, and rejoined them. They didn't dismantle them at all. [laughs] So the best-laid plans of mice and men--.

Riess: That's great thinking, though.

DeMars: As part of our dormitory in Vallejo, they needed a cafeteria building, and a general office. I guess that went along with the

planning of it. And later on, and not too much later, they decided they needed a recreation building for all these single men. So we designed quite a nice building with lounges for reading and games, and a gymnasium, basketball court, and pool tables and--I forget whatever--card tables, I guess.

Riess: Were you able to reuse a community center design from your Farm Security work?

DeMars: No, no. It was designed for Vallejo, and quite a different problem, a recreational center for single men. And of course there was nothing like the cafeteria building in any of our farm labor programs.

At the time the problem was first given us, a young man made an appointment to see me. He had just graduated from Harvard--one of Walter Gropius's students. He and a classmate were doing the grand tour of the United States on a scholarship as I recall, and were particularly interested in the work of the FSA. In fact, he wanted to work for us--for free, just for the experience. He showed me some of his student projects and I was really quite impressed.

Our office was swamped with work at the time, and we couldn't free anyone to start on the cafeteria and office problem, so I approached Herb Halsteen, the district engineer, on this. Well, there was just no way to work this into the budget right then. I then pleaded that the fellow seemed quite capable, and besides, wanted to work for free! "Well," said Halsteen, "we can't do that--we'll have to pay him something." And so we did. He carried the job forward in the usual draftsman relationship--I had my finger in it, but the design was pretty much his.

After a couple of weeks or so--and I don't recall what his classmate was doing during this time--he announced that he had to move on and join his friend because they were going to Mexico next. I said, "Oh, no you're not, you're going to stay right here until you finish your part in this job." And he did!

Riess: What was his name?

DeMars: Our young draftsman was Norman Fletcher, who became one of the five principals, including Gropius, in the firm, and concept, named TAC, "The Architects Collaborative," which had--perhaps still has--a world-wide practice. Although each of the principals might head up a given project, there was to be equal participation in design, review, etc. [laughs] It's hard to believe that Gropius was not a little more equal than the others.

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DeMars: Just about that time we must have been already involved in the Japanese relocation situation as well. That was another thing we were assigned, you see. I guess the dormitories must have been finished by then, when they realized they needed this recreation facility.

I think there was a bit of a time gap before doing the large cafeteria building. I think you saw the pictures of it, in the catalogues in architecture? It was quite large, the cafeteria building, and the side wall was done with these windows. And that's one place where they stacked up, you see. These are four-foot by four-foot windows, matching our four foot module--the width of plywood--used throughout. You could have them lined up and some could be opened and some not.

I should mention that this whole layout, including the cafeteria but not the rec building, was repeated in Richmond for Henry Kaiser's shipyard there, where, as you know, they were prefabricating the ships. Every other window could open, but not every one, because there would be nothing to hold the hardware. That obviously was cheaper to do. It also didn't require this fine fitting; you could count on the four-by-eight panel, and you could count on this being slapped on the outside of it.

Housing Standard, NHA, 1943, and the British Experience

DeMars: Then we were brought in to do some planning on the Japanese relocation problem. I think we were pretty much emotionally upset at the whole business since we lost two of our young, talented architects, and longtime close friends to it: "Hachi" and "Si," Hachiro Yuasa and Siberius Saito. We thought we ought to make the best of what we felt was a very unfair and unnecessary proposition. Eckbo was still with us at the time. It was obvious that we were about to wind up, because all the Farm Security building had been completed, and I must have been negotiating to take this job with the National Housing Agency.

Carl Koch--do you know the name? He was in the Housing Standards Section of the Technical Division of the National Housing Agency, where a small staff had been set up to consider postwar problems of housing. After we had done this work in Vallejo and so forth, and other things had been built around the country, Washington had developed standards for any more war housing that might be needed. By the time I got there, standard

plans had been distributed for the Northwest and other places where aircraft plants were being started, and so forth.

In every case, we heard that as soon as the standard plans got into the locality, they had to get an architectural staff to change them, make them according to local codes, and change all of the things that didn't work. So, "Thank You. If you'd just given us the job in the first place, we think we might have done as well and saved a lot of time." You could have had some recommended standards, but not a bunch of detailed plans they were required to use. But all of this was over by the time I got to Washington. The remaining war housing projects were all well under way by this time, and probably according to the modified standard plans.

Anyway, before all this, the FSA was brought in to lay out some of the permanent communities for the relocation of the Japanese. There were two specific sites. We had even gone down to Manzanar and saw the situation there when they were just in the first weeks of moving in. This was to be temporary, and they were to have permanent sites, far away from there. One was to be on the Gila River for 30,000 people, and another one in Colorado for some large number.

So we started doing some layouts. Garrett [Eckbo] was working on this. We were to do the site plans, but there would be standard barracks for the living quarters. Then, we were specifically to design nurses' housing, a gymnasium building, and let's see, maybe managers' houses, some such thing like this. Strange pieces pulled out of it all. On the Gila River, the gymnasium was to be made of adobe, since they have the makings of it there.

When all this was being discussed in the front office with the chief engineer, and so forth, and since we'd been doing the layouts of things we sat in on this, Eckbo said, well, he thought from the social point of view, even from the management point of view, it would be much better to have three communities of 10,000 each. So they thought that was a good idea.

I don't know how far Garrett carried the plans, but it was very shortly after that that I was approached by Carl Koch, who had written a letter to the guy in charge of this office in Washington, D.C.

Riess: Housing Standards Section, Technical Division, National Housing Agency?

DeMars: Yes. Now, the Chief of Housing Standards Section had just joined the Marines. The Housing Section now consisted of only two other

people, besides him. There may have been a bigger staff; I never even asked, I guess, who had developed the rest of these plans before. I think there was quite a large staff, and it had finally come down to this group, who were mostly now to be assessing postwar roles for housing, and revealing what the British were doing, and so forth.

Well, having lost the boss, the Chief of Housing Standards, Carl, somehow persuaded them to hire me. I'd never met Carl, but the FSA work had been published, and he knew about work I'd done, and I think he was able to talk them into this idea that I was a resource. So, I agreed to move to Washington, and I think this must almost have been the week when we were folding up the FSA work in San Francisco, because some army engineers came in, and were looking at rolls of blueprints and things, for the relocation camps. They just took this, and we said, "Well, that's the end of that story, isn't it?" And years later, we heard that they actually followed the three town plan on the Gila River, even built the gymnasium out of adobe.

Riess: It became an Army Corps of Engineers project?

DeMars: Yes.

In Washington, I spent a lot of time reading stuff that we got from England about their housing programs, their experience with what we might call public housing--I don't want to use that word, because we have an image, rather negative, of public housing here--but they were involved in housing, much of it that had subsidy. That was the only way you could build housing that ordinary full-time, fully-employed families could afford either to rent or to own. I think it was mostly for rental. We haven't come to that same conclusion yet, which is incredible to me. Now I think I'm hearing it all over again.

I would say the big conclusion I came out of this with, reading the British things, was after their experience, this mistake--and I think I quoted it in "Look Homeward, Housing"--was to take one social class, or one economic group, and put them all into hundreds of units in one area. Or even put together families of a certain age group, say with a couple of children, because they're the ones that needed housing, and then as they go through the whole sequence over the years, suddenly none of the housing in the area fits the changed family composition.

The British were saying this was their experience, and I thought, well, it sounds sensible. Generally the FHA would take as big a chunk of land as possible, and require you to have all the houses be different, but they had to be sort of the same, and

they were for a particular income group, because that's what the FHA would insure. So the typical builder--they'd all be two-bedroom houses, in those days, and you could foresee what happened. Where did Grandma live? There would be no small apartment nearby. And when the kids were ready to get married they couldn't afford to live there, and they couldn't rent, because there were no places to rent nearby at all. The British were spelling this all out, and I thought, My God!

Then we were given the opportunity--is this on tape?

Riess: Yes. I think this is--let's leave it a cliffhanger. "Then we were given the opportunity."

DeMars: All right, we'll leave that.

VII WASHINGTON

[Interview 7: February 23, 1989]###

National Housing Agency--Fort Drive Gardens' Plan

DeMars: I should explain how we got into the project that became our main accomplishment in that Washington office. (I was there less than a year, you see, before I went into the navy.) The Architectural Forum, the top professional journal at the time, was already on a postwar pitch. They were inviting a number of architects to do a study of a postwar community, for publication.

We were approached. I think there were only three of us all together in my part of the office by this time. (A little later on we had another interesting addition to the office, as a draftsman, John Johansen, a recent Harvard graduate who later became an architect of some note who--he did the U.S. embassy in Dublin, Ireland, and was very hot on the cutting edge of things a few years back.)

Riess: Who were the other architects?

DeMars: Carl Koch, and then Mary Goldwater who was an architect, but particularly interested in the social problems. A little bit like the gal who did the Easter Hill study, Clare Cooper. I'd say that Mary Goldwater was an earlier version.

We also were doing some work on housing standards with the foundation in New York supported by the American Radiator Company. They had a small staff, and they were doing all kinds of real futuristic thinking. A bed environment that was like a breadbox. You climbed into it, and they had all the necessities inside, lights, air conditioning, music, and so on. That was a pure think-tank outfit. They would take people off the street, or whatever, very much like what Walter Landor does on his ferry boat where they have a little Safeway store laid out, with shelving and

things, and they can put the new package designs, enough of them to see which catch your eye, and all this kind of thing.

Riess: Marketing studies.

DeMars: A marketing study thing using real guinea pigs.

Riess: And this foundation?

DeMars: Well, they took us up there to try it on us. They would actually build these things. They built this bread box affair.

Because we were in the Housing Standards Section we met the people and went to New York and saw some of the things they were doing. We met a lot of the prefabricators--prevaricators [laughing] --prefabricators that were working on things. They'd come to see us, could we support their system? Well, we weren't supporting things.

Riess: The Housing Standards section was willing to entertain these new ideas?

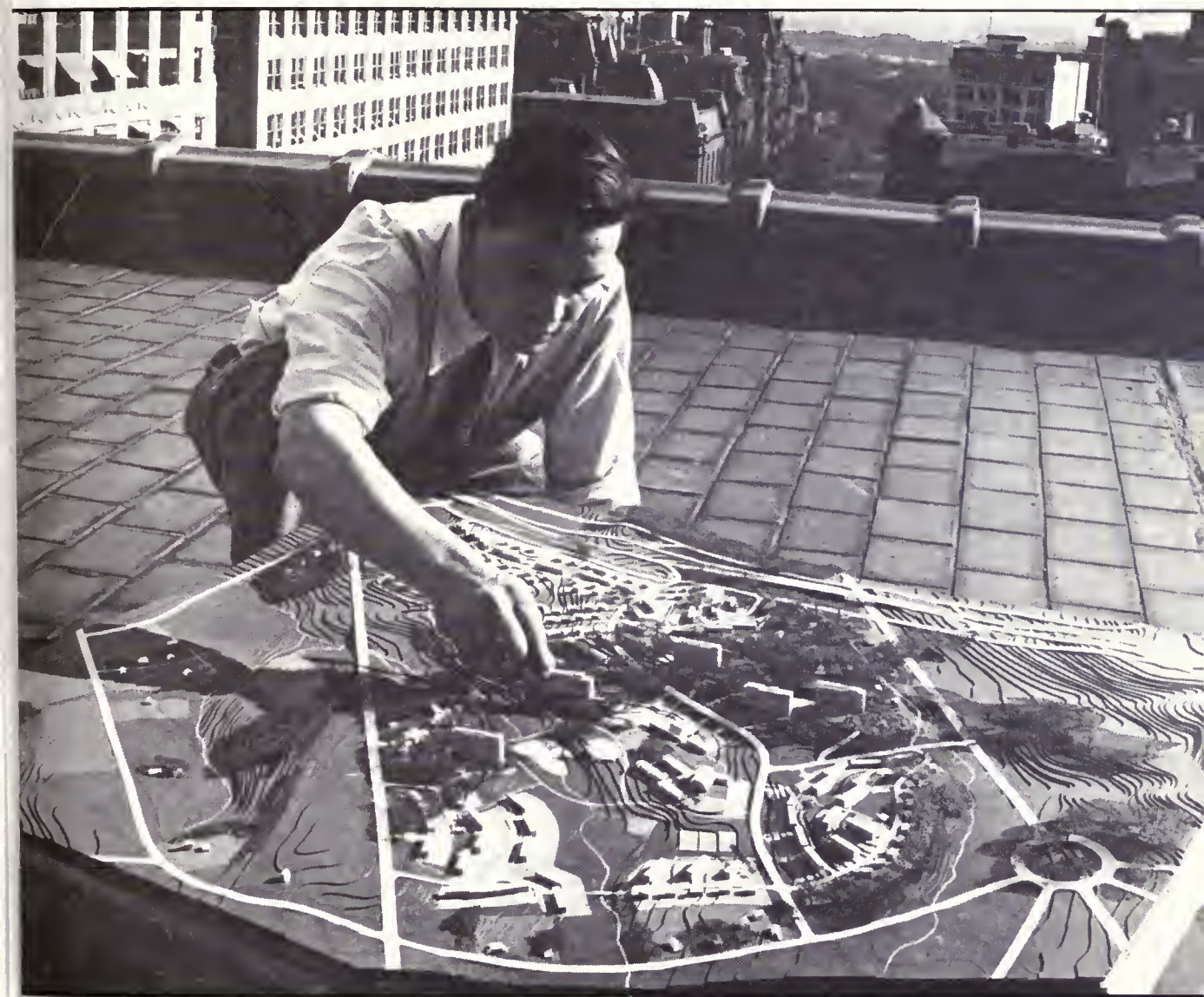
DeMars: Well, it didn't get that far, quite. I suppose they were drawing on our interest, if any, and it was just--. In spite of being Chief of the Housing Standards, I had a boss [laughs] who was head of the technical division of the National Housing Agency, so it had a number of other divisions under it, and one of them was Housing Standards, you see. I guess he must have been a contact before I got there, and told me, "Look into this, go and see what they're doing, and report on it," this kind of thing as well.

Riess: Reminds me of Buckminster Fuller's little bathroom modules. All of that stuff makes sense, but it's never been really used.

DeMars: Yes. We went to see Fuller's little bathroom at the National Bureau of Standards. We were quite often in touch with them and what they were doing.

There were a number of people working on prefabrication, and movable partitions. Carl Koch was very much intrigued with the notion that you might in an apartment house build the basic structure and so forth, but the outer walls would be adaptable to whether a person wanted a balcony or not, and the rooms could be arranged with movable partitions. They've got them now, usually in office situations. But Carl was very much interested in that.

So, Architectural Forum solicited our interest in doing this study. I asked the boss. It seemed to me that this would be a worthwhile thing for us to tackle, and what did he think? Was it



ernon DeMars with model of Fort Drive Gardens, a post-war community for a thousand families. Washington, D.C., 1943.

appropriate to what we were doing? I said what I'd like to do would be to try out as a design problem what mixed development means: you don't just go down the block and then you have a few houses, and then as happens typically in a non-planned situation if you allow mixed use, then you have an apartment house with the same or no setback, or you have a duplex, or you have something else on a given street pattern.

It was obvious that these different housing types, at least the highrise apartment, need a whole different kind of street access and so forth, from a single-family dwelling. And row houses need a different pattern, maybe. But that's why I wanted to explore it, and he thought that was appropriate.

Riess: Explore it on paper?

DeMars: Yes, just as a design problem. I felt that most--I didn't know really any American situations where this was done. In the first place, the FHA maybe not frowned, but it wasn't among their standards. In fact, they advised against mixing things. If they were building two-bedroom houses, they were all two-bedroom houses, oh, several blocks of them. Each house had to be different, but it also had to be the same.

Riess: And yet, you quoted somebody named Colean who seemed to be a government person.

DeMars: Oh yes, Miles Colean, a top administrator of the FHA. He was questioning their standards, that is, his own standards.

Well, we took it on. One of the main things about it, on the team you had to have a developer [Paul Stone]. Even though the scheme was hypothetical, they wanted an actual piece of land which might be available, and he would be an advisor as you'd develop the scheme. He would be a consultant. He would price it out, and so forth. So we found a site north of Washington D.C. I guess it's just outside the Beltway now. I forget the exact acreage. I showed you the little sketch that was the model of the project.

Riess: This is Fort Drive Gardens?

DeMars: Yes. Here was a given situation: it had a small valley in it, it was surrounded by major freeways on two sides, and on a third I think is this Beltway that collects all the edges of Washington. There was a piece of land in there that was virtually empty. There were a few houses in it. It was quite an interesting pattern of open land and treed areas.

So we took it on, as though we were really doing a plan for that exact place, and as we talked about it, it seemed to me that a highrise apartment was going to be part of it. We were trying to pump up the density, because that's the real problem: how can you make pleasant living with all the amenities, and enough people to support them, and yet not do the typical spread that's covering up the land of the country? Anyone can do that almost, you just lay out a subdivision.

In fact, in those days you'd go in and make a subdivision, and then you sold lots. Maybe the builder would get three lots, and he'd do a house, and then someone else, and so on. After the war, the big change in development was a builder went in and did a complete scheme. He would do the streets and the sewers and the sidewalks and the houses, and he'd sell the whole thing. He didn't sell a lot to a person who would then get someone to build a house for him, and so on. But that was really the pattern at that time.

We proceeded to follow sort of the British example, where you'd have some detached houses, because what we wanted to do was to have a very low density where the forested areas were, as far as single-family houses, and we thought it would preserve the forest if it was occupied by houses like a national park or a national forest. And you can build, and maybe you can cut down enough trees for a little clearing where your house is.

Riess: These sound like they would be upper-income houses.

DeMars: Yes, that was the thought. Well, we were going to spread the income levels as well, because again, the British thing suggests that they shouldn't be all of one income level, or one social class, or one family composition, because if you have only one of any of these things, that precludes the moving from one to the other, and so forth. We were using this argument that the American dream is mobility, socially and economically and so forth, and why shouldn't you be able to have this mobility within a comparatively small area?

This later became called a PUD, planned unit development. It was well after the war that this began happening. The whole thesis was that if you could get a large enough area to assemble land together, it could have its own street pattern and so forth, and this could be presented to the planning staff in your town, and it would be judged on its own merits. It wouldn't have to follow all the details of zoning that were set up for smaller parcels or already existing street layouts or whatever. A Planned Unit Development was the name given to this sort of thing. But again, that was really well after the war. That would allow mixed

development, if the planning commission could be talked into it, if they agreed.

Riess: But local ordinances would determine--.

DeMars: Building codes would still apply, the structural codes, and this kind of thing. But setbacks and size of lots, and a lot of other things of this sort, like required width of streets, would not apply if you could argue the reasons for doing it in a different way.

Riess: When you were working on Fort Drive Gardens, were you being paid by the government, or did you just do it on your own?

DeMars: Oh, no. We did that as a project of the office, you see, and it was identified as such in Architectural Forum when it was published [October 1943], and later in Fortune magazine, as an example of a new kind of community.

Riess: In the Housing Standards Section you were really trying to redefine housing?

DeMars: Well, yes, and to establish whether if certain kinds of things, recommended from experience elsewhere, were actually worked out as though you were going to build it, whether you did build it or not, this would be of use, because that's the way the word spreads in the architectural area.

For instance, in the international competition for the Chicago Tribune building Raymond Hood did a gothic building that got the first prize--and that was the end of gothic skyscrapers, practically. The second prize was Eliel Saarinen, which had immense influence over the whole country, that is, influence on other architects as a design idiom.

But anyway, on this thing, it was interesting. Carl Koch was a very bright guy and a good designer, and he had a good feel for where the buck was. He not only designed some very avant-garde things, but they were attractive. Later on he set up a corporation and had a company that built them. The Tech-Built House was one. And that had aspects of prefabrication.

Gropius had a system. His modules, three of them made ten feet. You can see why that was. Gropius, as former director of the Bauhaus, was still a European in heart and mind, so naturally the single module was a meter. With us, three feet isn't quite enough to do it. Doing a house, a three-foot hallway is just a little tight, and I suppose another whole foot, that is, four feet, really already an American standard, seems a little

wasteful, so thirty-nine inches, a few more inches, gives just a little more ease for moving through, etc.

But it added up that it had too many panels and parts. I don't know that they ever--they probably built a few full-sized test assemblies of this sort. But it was too much still under the notion of war housing economics. When the war was over, Gropius and his group of bright young Harvard graduates had bigger and better things to do. And they did them. As TAC, "The Architects Collaborative," they went on to do embassies and large projects both here and abroad.

Riess: Tell me about a typical day at the Housing Standards office.

DeMars: Well, when we needed a new draftsman for this particular project, and I don't know that we spent much more than a week or so, no maybe a few of weeks on it.

Riess: Putting together Fort Drive Gardens?

DeMars: Yes. And we had meetings, of course, with the builder, and we had other things we had to carry on at the same time. So when we got this Carl said, "There's a young draftsman from Harvard that I think we ought to try to get in here, and his name is John Johansen." Johansen was hired, and he did some of the sketches on our project for the publication. I haven't been able to find the issue from the Architectural Forum, but it's findable, anyway. And Fortune. I'll try to find them both for you, to plug in.

Another architect that we met in Washington wanted to help participate, so he did a little diagram sketch showing a single-family house, a double house, a row house, a flat, a walk-up flat, in other words, and highrise [elevator] apartments. On the other side of the sketch he had different kinds of family--single person, a young couple, the growing family, the family with teenagers, the older couple, and so forth. And he had cross diagrams that laced back and forth showing which ones were appropriate to which. This was a little logo kind of thing that was used. He had a very nice sketching ability, so that was his contribution.

I guess it must have been later that Fortune magazine--they didn't correspond with me, they simply got it directly. Time, Life, and Fortune, and Architectural Forum was one of their publications. There was some discussion about postwar building, and at the bottom of the page there was a strip which had an air view of the plan, and a discussion about it.

Riess: What did you actually get done in Washington that year?

DeMars: I think that almost the major thing was this particular notion of breaking through the standards that were typically against mixed uses in development. It's pretty common now, if there's a site that's large enough. It still has the difficulty of doing the whole package, as we did there at Fort Drive, that is, up to you might say upper-class, elevator apartments.

In San Francisco they built a thing--remember the Pink Palace which was the very locale of all the criminal drug-dealing and so forth, right there two blocks from St. Mary's Cathedral? I was involved in the layout of that area, you see. [DeMars did a master plan for the Western Addition, San Francisco.] That was one of the things that happened when I came back. It had mixed uses, and one of the mixed uses were where appropriate a few highrise apartments, and then some flats typical of the San Francisco walkup flats. I did sketches of these to suggest them.

Well, when public housing took over part of that area, they did the row houses, the ones that were done by Marquis and Stoller? St. Francis Square? Very much praised. [1961 housing co-op financed by ILWU under FHA program.] The whole Western Addition was one of these bombed-out areas--that's the way redevelopment was to be done at that time. You went and cleared it and said, "Here's your site," and I think there was sufficient reaction to that that they tried more integration later on, even preserving buildings.

Riess: That year in Washington you were able to effect some kind of a breakthrough in this new way of thinking about mixed housing?

DeMars: I think so. And interestingly enough, Carl Koch, as I say, later on did some very good building and prefabs and so forth. He didn't think my mixed development thing was such a big deal. In fact, he was interested in the single building, in a way, and he was interested in his apartments with the movable partitions. I said, "Okay, Carl, you're the architect for that part of it on Fort Drive." So he just worked on that. Whereas Mary Goldwater was very interested in the mixed development scheme because of the sociological aspects of it.

Postwar, Bannockburn

DeMars: At the end of the next year, when I was down in Puerto Rico in the navy, I heard that a cooperative in Washington D.C. had bought a golf course called Bannockburn, right on the outskirts of

Washington, in Glen Echo. Both the Potomac River and the historic Chesapeake and Ohio Canal go right by it, and this is where there was an amusement park. The golf course was put up for sale, surrounded by pretty fancy houses on rather large lots. It was zoned for that because they were zoned overlooking a golf course. The whole area was zoned for single-family development, you see, but they figured they could get it changed.

They wrote to me in Puerto Rico. They had seen the illustration in Fortune magazine, and that's exactly what they wanted. They wanted the mixture of things so the young people could live there, Grandmother could live there, the babysitter, the whole business, you see. We corresponded back and forth. I was just about to finish my tour of duty in the navy, and Betty and I couldn't wait to get back to California, which was our plan. But this job sounded like a chance to carry out the Fort Drive idea.

Carl Koch was one of those interviewed too. Another one of the people that they considered was Frank Lloyd Wright. He wrote this marvelous letter.

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DeMars: He started off saying he'd never seen anything worthwhile come out of a cooperative yet. And then he threw in little digs about the group of ladies on the board, or something. And then, he said, "And besides, anyone who would wish to have Frank Lloyd Wright for an architect wouldn't consider having anyone else."

The way it was said, it was both arrogant and quite correct. I think you wouldn't say, "We're considering a half a dozen different architects and we'd like you to submit your credentials." Well, you know. [laughs] It was worded with--Tom Wolfe couldn't have done it better. I think I have a copy of the letter somewhere. I'm sure it's in existence. [I now have a copy for the record--VDM, 5 May, 1991.]

Riess: And you were one of the architects considered.

DeMars: I was one of the architects considered, and I got the job. But they also wanted--. Have you heard a reference to Ladera?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: That's down the [San Francisco] peninsula. And then in Los Angeles there was a group called Mutual Homes. I wrote a piece for California Arts and Architecture, after the fact, that all three of them were cooperatives, and all of them got three architects, so that they never could agree on only one architect


Mary Fox Herling
 Mary Goldwater
 Group Housing Cooperative
 1129 Veemont Avenue, N. W.
 Washington D. C.

Dear Ladies of the Group Housing Cooperative of Washington D.C.: I have yet to see a single thing a cooperative has done that had either good sense or architectural merit.

I don't like to think this is due to the nature of the movement itself. But, the "awareness" behind your communication would seem to indicate that it might be so. Since I only work for clients for whom no other architect would do and who would not build unless I consented to build for them, you can readily see what answer I must give to your request for inside information on my "capacities", "experience" and "organization" where your project is concerned.

Perhaps this information concerning my "qualifications" will enable you to know a good bargain when one turns up in your "shopping-around": - a custom repulsive to any self-respecting architect. To my contempt for that practice you owe this unkind reply to your circular letter.

Sincerely yours,


 Frank Lloyd Wright

June 17th, 1946

N. B. I suggest you read "When Democracy Builds" which should show you what I really think of your enterprise. Should you be really interested to know.

to do it. "This one, he'll give us this, and this one will see that the other two--" something or other. They all did this same thing, almost as if there had been a formula or something, of how to go about doing one of these: you buy a beautiful piece of rolling land covered with trees, which is empty and open, or it's a golf course, and it's available, the land is cheap, and it's cheap because it's hilly, and expensive to develop.

I met with the fellows in Los Angeles, and they had one interesting idea. Instead of having a very expensive survey made of this hilly site, they must have had a rough survey of some sort. Then an engineer sort of laid out roads by pointing a stick and walking over it, and they trailed through the hillsides with a bulldozer. They did a rough thing, instead of doing all the careful engineering things which cost more. Apparently, it works rather well, but I would never have thought that engineers would have stood still for that kind of thing, like our engineers in the Farm Security who said they couldn't lay out circles.

Bannockburn, like these others, had a little valley with a stream through it, and some steep sides here, and up the middle it was heavily wooded, and of course the fairways came down these flat places, and so forth. We put the highrise apartments coming up out of the trees, just like I did in Fort Drive. It looked great, and we were going to have row houses, and so forth.

First we had to get the zoning changed, because it was zoned for single-family residences. We were going to put single families on the roadway around the edge anyway, to sort of match the ones already there, and these would be rather expensive houses, and they would be rather nice houses. But then we thought--there was this little valley, and the apartment house in the trees was like the equivalent of a good long city block away from the existing houses across the road. There was no way these home owners could say that this was really spoiling their views.

However, that had nothing to do with it. They didn't want anything built there at all. By not giving in on the zoning they thought they could prevent it from happening. Well, it didn't. We went ahead. I think later on they were able to build some duplexes and things, and what they did was get smaller and smaller lots. We would have had good-sized lots for single-family houses.

Riess: What were you able to do there?

DeMars: We got a builder, and ultimately we did twenty-five rather nice single-family houses.

But the price tags were going up on the whole thing, we had to build a road in to serve these houses, and they were on the hilly side, so that was expensive. It was much more than they'd hoped to spend; the developer's prices were much more than what he led them to believe at first. They got into this cooperative to save money, you see. The reason you have a co-op, I guess.

These would be sort of middle-class people, professionals, who see the virtue of cooperation, but who are not necessarily well-heeled, and so they're doing this thing to save money, and also because of the notion that they could have amenities which they wouldn't find provided by the usual tract builder. They like the idea of hilly land, and they will have a nursery school, and they will have a community building, the existing golf clubhouse which was right in the middle of the property. They would have a lot of these things, which one doesn't just find provided by the ordinary builder, who wants to get in and get out.

Getting in and getting out is part of the secret of lower cost, so delays in ours in Washington went on for a couple of years before it even got started. We thought that this would just move along and start going. When nothing had happened after the first year, some of the people wanted to get out. Others wanted to dissolve the cooperative. They spent money for the architects and so on. They argued that--and this was lovely too--that there should be just as many people for dissolving the cooperative on the board of directors as those who were in favor of it, because that would be democracy! [laughter]

I can remember heated arguments about the only way to have proper representation on the board was to balance those who wanted to dissolve the corporation and those who wanted to go ahead! [laughs] Later on, in going back into the thing, I found that the Los Angeles group and Ladera had almost the same problems. It was quite interesting. We didn't know that this was being done at all. Neither of the three of us knew about each other's struggles.

Riess: Where did the notion of this particular kind of cooperative housing movement come from?

DeMars: I think there were aspects of cooperative housing in New York City at an earlier time. Usually there was a board. It was not like condominiums. In fact, the first time I ever heard the word "condominiums" was in Puerto Rico. That was apparently a thing, newly developed there, but known in the Latin countries, where you actually can own your apartment, and you can sell it to someone else. I think Sunnyside in New York City is one of the early ones. Catherine Wurster--Catherine Bauer--refers to it as early

housing where it was a cooperative group that got together and purchased a big enough piece of land, like two blocks or something, to do apartments on, and then they would be living in the apartments. I think maybe you had an ownership, but it was a share of the cooperative, and you couldn't sell your thing without the approval of the entire cooperative.

Riess: These were started in the thirties?

DeMars: Even earlier, I would think. I would even say the twenties, or something.

Riess: It's not a particularly American notion.

DeMars: No. Well, New York, you have a lot of people who aren't particularly of American background, and probably populations from--I think some of the Jewish population, and some Scandinavians. And New York will have a good proportion of those who weren't necessarily indigent.

Riess: Do you know a project that Frank Lloyd Wright did in Westchester County called Usonia?

DeMars: I know of his using that term, and I suppose right now I didn't know whether it was hypothetical or whether it actually was done.

Riess: I've heard that the purchasers of the houses had to be psychoanalyzed before they could be part of it. This was one of the ground rules, not to help out the architect, but because they were striving for the ideal community of self-aware people.

DeMars: That's something they neglected to do at Casa Grande, the project in Arizona. I think I told you about that. These were going to be these displaced farmers, you see, from the Dust Bowl, and in the book that was written about it later it was suggested that a different group of people might have been able to make it work. But these were all--they were rugged individualists.

Riess: At Bannockburn, how many different house types did you have to produce for twenty-five houses?

DeMars: I would say we had about six or seven.

Riess: And did you do them?

DeMars: Yes. I got two draftsmen. I have to go back to say on this thing I was teamed up with Joseph Neufeld, an architect in New York who'd come from Israel and had been involved in Tel Aviv in cooperative housing and so forth. I don't know whether he was

added to me, or I was added to him, as they were getting their three architects. And since neither of us were from the Washington area, or had connections to influence the planning commission or whatever, we had to get a third architect who had connections in Maryland--so we did. This was Rhees Burket, who had just finished an elementary school near our project.

Then I had to find an office and a place to live, which wasn't easy right after the war. We finally got a whole floor of a flat on Jefferson Place, one block from the headquarters of the public housing building, a very modern building of quite good design on Connecticut Avenue, and very nice. Our street was just one block long, quite a long block, with Victorian brownstone houses. In fact, the mayor of Washington lived several doors up. We'd keep getting tickets on our car, and Betty said to the cop, "But we live here! We've got to have a place to park!" He said, "Well, gee, lady, the mayor lives up here, and we've got to keep it clean." [laughs]

But anyway. We spent I would say a good deal of the first six months, the three architects arguing, mostly with Neufeld, about drawing up our articles of association, credit and sharing the profits and the responsibility and all that. We all got attorneys, because he wouldn't budge. And here, my gosh, there was money going out, and the attorneys were beating their heads because they couldn't get him to come along. He was living in New York, so it was quite evident he wasn't going to move down to Washington, but this was the cooperative's idea, to have his knowledge about cooperatives from his experience in Israel.

Well, I don't think there was any contribution at all on that. It was all arguing about how we'd get along together. We started building a model and so forth, and I would say his contribution was absolutely zero, and it cost them quite a pretty penny. I think later on we bought him off, or something.

Riess: You did, or the cooperative did?

DeMars: Well, I think sort of both, in some way.

Riess: It sounds like an absolutely scarringly bad experience, offhand.

DeMars: [laughs] In some ways it was. I'd never been really to any large extent in private practice. I'd gone from Farm Security, which is a government agency, and then to the National Housing Agency, and then the Puerto Rican experience--which I'd like to touch on a little bit. I was not in the private world where I had to make a living getting projects and so forth. This cooperative was not the best introduction, but finally, the people were very nice that

I was working with, and a very good friend of mine actually ended up buying one of the bigger houses in Washington, still lives there, large family. She was from Berkeley, originally. When I got to Puerto Rico, she was in some kind of Peace Corps thing, or Red Cross, in Puerto Rico. She's a longtime friend of the family.

Riess: If anyone who's reading this oral history goes to Bannockburn, they're going to find what now?

DeMars: They'll find this first group of houses. I don't know that they went on. We built the whole length of the side against where the original land owners had faced the golf course. In other words, this they had to approve of, because the lots had to be that size, and so forth. They didn't build on the golf course side of the road because it was steep and would have been expensive. Their side was almost flat, you see.

It was almost exactly this way [as the street here]. Right across the street it dropped down into a creek, but it was a little wider than this. It was deep enough that we had enough room for two rows of lots, but the houses above were entered off the existing street, some of them. Others, because it started to fall off from the street, it was cheaper to have their entrances come off a private roadway paralleling the main road.

Riess: What did you get done that you think was excellent and worthy of emulation?

DeMars: The group of houses. And they have a kind of a California look, of all things, I'm a little ashamed of that now, but anyway--.

Riess: The architecture, is it like anything that you had done before?

DeMars: It might have been a little bit like that final house that I showed you at Mineral King Ranch, the one for the cooperative farm with the fifteen families. There was a little house that had a carport at one end, and redwood siding and white trim. It was that kind of an idiom. I think we had a little steeper roofs.

When we got these houses started, Betty and I, we were getting itchy. We had thought originally that we could clean this up in a year, and we were pushing into the third year--maybe it was through the third year. That's how I got involved at MIT, because when we were stalled I went up to Harvard to see Bill and Catherine, and now I was no longer a government employee.

Riess: You were completely employed by the Bannockburn job?

DeMars: Well, yes, but my own firm, as the architect.

Riess: Did you have any other jobs?

DeMars: No. Not trying to. This would have been enough to keep us busy, had it been really rolling, but it would get stalled. So, the two guys, they had their work laid out for them, and I went up to see Bill and Catherine at MIT. I told them about the problem I was having. He said, "How would you like to come and teach for a while?" I said, "I have to be down there part of the time certainly." He said, "Well, you can commute back and forth." So we worked this out.

Postwar. Between Washington and MIT

DeMars: We were going to move to Boston, because I don't think we even had this final house that we had gotten on Jefferson Place. We were in a terrible little apartment, the only thing we could find at first. Windows on a light well, or something, and we were looking around all the time for another place to live down there. So we thought we'd try Boston--or rather, Cambridge.

What I did was I would be Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Cambridge, with classes, an all-day kind of thing. And then I would be Thursday and Friday in Washington. And then Saturday and Sunday at home, or some Saturdays if there were a rush on, we'd do it. I would work with the guys at the office, and then Sunday night we'd go to a movie. Then Betty'd drive me to Union Station, any time after ten o'clock--the train left at one o'clock, one a.m.--and I went to bed. The train got in at six o'clock in Boston, and they kicked you off at eight, and I often got kicked off. People said, "Why didn't you take an airplane?" Good Lord, I would have been hours at the airport! This was very neat, and it really worked very nicely.

Riess: Did Bill Wurster hire you to teach a regular design class, or were you the housing expert?

DeMars: No, a design class. This has some trailers to it too. [laughs]

Riess: I'm sure.

DeMars: A design class, and then of course I shared an office with Aalto. You can fill out the thing from the Alvar Aalto story, which pretty well tells about meeting Aalto. But did I talk about Eastgate Apartments yet?

Riess: No, you haven't. Do you think that we ought to take that side trip into the navy?

DeMars: Yes, I think we'd better.

Riess: Really. We'll just set sail briefly.

DeMars: Back up for just a moment--I was telling about leaving Washington. We [Betty and I] agreed this would be a good time, that we really wanted to get back. I couldn't go on dedicating the rest of my career to getting Bannockburn done. And it seemed to be rolling, houses were under construction, and so forth. So I turned it over to my two colleagues. Now, one was Arthur Keyes, Jr., and the other was Nick Satterly. Nicholas Satterly. Satterly had a very fine graphics skill, like Don Reay, a good style, and a good designer. Later on it became Keyes, Lethbridge, and Condon, the whole firm. Unfortunately, Satterly died. A very nice guy.

Riess: How did you hire Keyes and Satterly? Were they Berkeley people?

DeMars: No, no, they were eastern. It could be that Mary Goldwater may have known them, or I may have met them when I was--I bet we met when I was there with the National Housing Agency. Both of them were, I think, from Harvard. They were both practicing architects, and had been published, so they seemed like a very good pair to have.

When we arranged to leave Washington, they took over, and they became one of the more important firms in Washington. If you know Dupont Circle, which is up Connecticut Avenue, that's considered the beginning of Embassy Row. Massachusetts Avenue takes off from Dupont Circle. There are two of these large circles: Thomas Circle on the east side, and Dupont Circle on the west and diagonal streets branch off from both of them as in L'Enfant's plan.

Dupont Circle, there are apartments around there, and a lot of really quite classy residences, large ones, most of them made into sort of apartments since, but at one time there had been, back in the middle to late 19th century, lots of Richardsonian sort of things. Keyes' firm has a six-story office building which they built a block off Dupont. They have the top floor or two, and the other parts were rented out. But they won several large competitions in redevelopment, and kept winning them in competition, and got the jobs, and did beautiful jobs.

Riess: And stayed in redevelopment?

DeMars: No, no, they did other work too, and very often published. The firm is still going. They were younger than I--almost everybody is. [laughs]

Riess: Working in government did you have any involvement with writing legislation or influencing anything about housing legislation?

DeMars: I did later in my career. But not back then. I'm trying to think--I know that I must have had some duties other than simply having a free vacation reading things in a hammock. [laughs] And I was meeting lots of foreign architects that would come there. Some of them already knew my name from Farm Security publication, and so on. And others who came to the agency would be sent over. I often attended meetings with the administrator--I can't remember his name right now--of the NHA, National Housing Agency.

Riess: Was there a little of the excitement of power that Washington has?

DeMars: Well, it wasn't so much a question of power as the--this was wartime, and Roosevelt was president, of course. And the exciting thing was the people that you would meet that were pulled in. There were university people, and they were happy to work for government at this time, and career people in administration, and all this.

I remember one of the things that we would argue about with Mary Goldwater and the others. There had been a change of administrators and I think the new one was someone who had no background in housing at all. He was an administrator--trained as such in public administration. We argued--can you assume that someone who knows about administration could administrate anything? Shouldn't you have some gut feeling about housing and the housing problem? Well, I guess they learn it soon.

In some ways I would be the one to say you could learn administration, but you ought to have that gut feeling that we need new housing, and so forth. But now I am inclined to think that maybe it is the other way around: if they'll keep their ears open and will take some advice and so forth, they'll soon learn about their subject, but knowing how to administrate the thing is some of the problem in San Francisco with running the housing program. Every year or two it blows up, doesn't it? They find all kinds of shenanigans going on with actual administration, and it isn't a question of design or program.

Riess: During the war people were brought to Washington out of the private sector and there probably were some pretty high hopes.

DeMars: Yes, it was very exciting. Lunch took place--well, our office was in the Barr Building, which is off--. Lafayette Square is the one in front of the White House. Our office was only about three blocks from the White House. Connecticut Avenue starts at Lafayette Square, and then you go up about a block and it sort of splits right through a block. One-third of the block was a little park, whose name I've forgotten, but that was very nice.

Our building was a little five-story building. There had been a row house that had been torn down about half a block away; there was a nice restaurant with an outdoor garden there. This was a half block away, and another half block in the other direction toward the White House was a French restaurant with also outdoor dining on the sidewalk. Later on, this got to be a place where all the bigwigs were meeting. I don't know whether Ollie North would have met there, but--. [laughs]

Riess: He's the kind of guy who ate in the office, I think. [laughs]

DeMars: But constant lunches with interesting people.

Two Books About Site Planning

DeMars: One of them [the interesting people] that I met during the time was a young fellow [Charles T. Stewart] who was the head of the Urban Land Institute. We met several times, sometimes in meetings with the administrator getting the word out, and so forth. He was interested in talking to me as an architect, and at a couple of luncheons he told me about something he was working on.

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DeMars: He'd been working for some time in translating from the German the book by Camillo Sitte called The Art of Building Cities [Reinhold, 1945]. It is quite an important work. This fascinated me because I was already quite aware of the kind of site planning going on in the Scandinavian countries. We'd see this in Sweden Builds and so forth. But it had almost no effect, you saw none of it in the English-speaking countries.

Sitte's general thesis in this was that in a city there should be squares and open places, you see, not just a gridiron. He was referring back to medieval practice, where they knew how to design a square. The street approaching it, instead of going on through past an empty block for a square so the wind blew through and so forth--they would come in in one corner of a square, almost

like maybe a swastika thing. And also, it gave you a vista at the end of the street, if it didn't go on through, so you could identify it.

And where would the fountain be placed? Well, it would be placed where it wasn't in the way of these things, and at first it wasn't even paved, so there were tracks around it. And on and on and on into this sort of thing, filled with illustrations of different kinds of squares. San Marco in Venice is his great love. He was an Italian, and many of his references are from Italian towns. I think he became a city planner in Vienna, or at least he did major plans for it. Whatever it was, he seemed to have abandoned everything he was talking about, because the end of the book shows the application of his theories, and as far as we could see, he'd abandoned them when he got his own design. [laughs] This fascinated me.

And then, finally, the English--I became acquainted with some of the people on the London magazine, the Architectural Review, which is certainly one of the great architectural magazines. They picked up on this theme quite independently of Sitte, I believe. Gordon Cullen and the review staff would periodically take on problems of town and city design--details all beautifully illustrated with his kind of "cartoony" sketches. Much of this was collected and put together later in his book Townscape [Reinhold, 1961]. The English had this experience from their own medieval towns and so on, and had a bit of application of some of this, but this book made one much more conscious of it. You could go back to these things for planning new areas. The new towns at first were not too aware of this, and some of the older suburban developments were totally unaware of this kind of site planning.

Architects and Washington Housing Agencies

Riess: When you were part of government, did anyone try to influence you? You talked about conversations and lunches with realtors.

DeMars: One thing about this developer on the Fort Drive project we were talking about, when we got down to the economics of the thing--. Part of the plan was that there'd be a little shopping center, and there'd be a school and a little theater, and it would be a little town. This was for a thousand families. Well, he got rather enthusiastic about the notion of getting increased density in the place, and he said, "I'd sell the houses at cost, but I'd own the market, and the buildings in the center, because here's my built-in patrons and so forth, guaranteed, here they are. I've

got the nearest market to it all. You could break even on that, it would work."

So I think we may have used this argument at times. We also felt that there could be a little internal subsidy, that maybe some of the houses on better sites and so forth you could charge more for, because the land has cost you the same amount originally for the entire thing, so it isn't as though you had to buy the expensive land. You're building a very nice house on a prominent site, so you charge what that would be worth later. That gets pumped in to bring down the cost of some of the others.

Riess: "To each according to his needs--."

DeMars: Yes, but not quite. This is still a capitalist economy, and even for public housing they have to charge. They're going to have to face this in San Francisco somehow right now. You can't build any new housing for people that need the housing that can't afford it. You're going to have to find some way to break through that.

Riess: Would it have been possible to continue to work through the questions of war housing and all of that on a local basis, or did it need to be centralized in Washington?

DeMars: I think that the standards could have been written, as later on they were by the FHA. As the FHA did it, they would give a statement, and they would give their explanation, the reason for it. And then I think they left it open to interpretation locally by their offices. Of course they were interested in the economic viability. This is what their standards were protecting. They felt that good housing, which people would like, would lead to it being more economical than a house that isn't well-planned. But they showed the standards. Now, in Washington there was a central office, and they actually were designing the plans of the cafeterias, the housing units, which we built for war housing, and everything. Most of these cities that had started in on it were already well into doing some things on their own.

Also during that period, as we mentioned, top architects were doing projects, like Lou Kahn did a project, Gropius did a project. There were at least half a dozen, and these were all published, the things they did, and very often they were quite experimental. Kahn was doing a bunch of almost Frank Lloyd Wright's cross-shaped plan.

Riess: And that was a result of having it centralized in Washington?

DeMars: No, this was before it got that much centralized. When I got back there, Kahn was just finishing up this project in Maryland someplace, and he had been appointed.

Riess: You write about, "sensitive interesting varied solutions, adapted to local condition and needs..." But once it was finally centralized, "resulting housing, though developed by capable architects, was bleak, unloved, and expensive." Could it have continued to be localized?

DeMars: I would think so, and in fact I came around to the conclusion later on--and maybe I've said this before, but it took me a time to come to this point--that towns and cities all over the country are designing their local drugstore, their this, their that, the other thing. Given the programming of what they're trying to do, if the government's going to subsidize certain things, obviously they need some controls. And they need standards: what is it they have in mind for this? If properly explained, then I think any local architect who knows the lay of the land--.

Obviously architects who have never had experience in group or mass housing, which is a different kind of a problem, and at that time there were plenty of them who had not, who had never done row houses or whatever, they may have needed a little bit more references to things that had been tried.

I think gradually public housing got a little bit better. But some places it was turned over to some pretty insensitive architects. I never saw it, but Catherine had a Kodachrome that I made a copy of of someplace in Texas, 3,000 units of public housing, brick, lined up like barracks. The front doors are right next to each other because the plan has been flipped so the plumbing's in the middle wall. It wouldn't have occurred to them to have the door on the other side, as we did at Easter Hill, and so forth. I think there's a little lid, minimum; in case it's pouring rain, you can stand under that while you get your key out.

Riess: The Federal Works Agency was "the administrating and coordinating body for WPA, PWA, PRA, USHA, PBA and others." Under it was the Division of Defense Housing [DDH], the group that employed Gropius, Breuer, Wurster, Saarinen, Stone, Stubbins, Frank Lloyd Wright. [TASK 2, 1941, article by Edward L. Barnes, pp. 11-13.] They must have had some kind of enlightened budgeting.

DeMars: Yes, I think that was early on.

Riess: The U.S. Housing Authority is referred to as a "research organization... of first importance... a working example of a de-

centralized Federal agency." [TASK, op. cit.] I wonder what kind of housing research the U.S. Housing Authority would have done?

DeMars: USHA. [thinking]

Riess: To be distinguished from the PBA, the Public Buildings Administration, which by the Lanham Act was "given complete charge of all defense housing, despite the fact that they had no housing experience."

DeMars: Which period are we talking about?

Riess: Defense housing.

DeMars: I think that they had an enlightened idea at the beginning of using top architects, where they found them, using any agency or ongoing operation that was already doing certain kinds of things, housing. It's conceivable when we did the war housing at Vallejo it was done through the Division of Defense Housing, but simply had this aspect of it turned over to our Farm Security office. Because they seemed to have been, you might say, innovative in reaching out to architects that they found were interested in exploring imaginative solutions to things. And not just for aesthetic imagination, but would take on a problem and solve it.

Soviet-American Friendship Committee

DeMars: During the wartime period, and this little story has repercussions for later on, I knew most of the architects involved in a lot of the things, being in Washington and in the National Housing Agency. One of them was a young architect who was involved, I think already, or later, in Germany rescuing some of the people that were rounded up for concentration camps and things. I think that he may very well have been a card-carrying member of the party. But anyway, there was a thing called the Soviet-American Friendship Committee. Among them, they had all kinds of groups. I think there were artists who were in favor of Soviet-American friendship, and there was an architects' committee.

I was approached by it, and on the board of directors were the editors of the three architectural magazines, all three of them. Wallace Harrison, architect of Rockefeller Center, who had been asked by Roosevelt himself to be on this committee. And there were several others that were on this. Here at the top of the page, Soviet-American Friendship: at the bottom of the page,

the board of directors. And among them was Vernon DeMars, Chief of Housing Standards, National Housing Agency.

I don't remember even ever going to a meeting particularly. I guess that's the way a lot of these things are. We were in favor of Soviet-American friendship at that time, and I think maybe there may have been an exhibit or some events. I don't really remember having much to do with it, but later on, when I came back to California and was on the faculty here, and was asked to be a consultant in the Ruhr in Germany on this Marshall Plan, about two days before I was to leave I had to phone Washington and say, "What the hell? Where's my ticket?" "Oh, we're not going to be able to send you now." "Why?" Well, they didn't quite know, but there was a question.

If you're not in any way involved with the FBI, if they have nothing on their record about you, then they make the check after. You can take the job, you see, and then they can fire you. But if there's already something in the record, they save a lot of time by simply not hiring the person. They'd meant to tell me about it. I said, "I'll be in Washington the day after tomorrow," and I did.

I went around to each of these people, each of them. I saw Wallace Harrison in New York, and when I told him what was going on he almost had a stroke right there. In no uncertain terms, each of them made a statement for me, which I then took back to the people I was supposed to be proving it to--I don't know whether it was the FBI or whatever. They were very interested in what I knew about this guy that had first invited me. He was an architect named Herman Field who I had met in Washington on several occasions when I was in the NHA.

Anyway, I was only about two days late, so they sent me. But they had already started to hire Bogner, from Harvard. Do you know the name? He was on the faculty there and had actually been in Germany the year before doing a similar program, so they were going to hire him again.

Riess: And they hadn't even let you know.

DeMars: They hadn't gotten around to letting me know yet.

Riess: Did they require that you testify about the person who had set this up?

DeMars: No, they just--they probably took it down or something. They were asking when did I know him? How much did I know about him? And I didn't know that much about him. I learned later that he had gone back there and had been involved at quite some risk in getting a

lot of the Jews out of Austria, and he came through in one piece. He managed it. But I think he might very well have been a member of the [Communist] party.

Riess: Were you particularly sensitized to this because of the loyalty oath business going on back here in Berkeley also?

DeMars: I'm trying to think of the date. That was very soon, wasn't it?

Riess: That was 1949, just about when you would have gotten done at MIT.

DeMars: Yes. I came out at the end of 1949, so I got right into it. I suppose my attitude was if the entire faculty were going to say that they would not sign, I would have joined them. And in fact I could have, I would have other work to do. But refusal to sign? I wasn't that strongly motivated to make a show of that.

I guess that I'm not a sacrificial type. I feel a little bit like Fletcher did, I think I have some other things to give. If I had wanted to go without architectural work, and without teaching or whatever, I don't know that my not signing would advance that. Only by getting some work could I work out some of my theories.

VIII THE NAVY YEARS

"Greetings"

Riess: On your tour of duty in the Atlantic, why hadn't you gotten into the navy before then, or into the armed services?

DeMars: Well, let me tell you about that. [laughs]

Riess: "Funny you should ask."

DeMars: Well, let's see. I was married, and I was over thirty. However, there was nothing at the time that excluded one. At first I think in general they weren't drafting married men. Then when they started drafting married men, a few months down the line, Carl Koch put in for officer training. He was married with a child, but he thought that if you're going to get drafted maybe you'd better be an officer than a "gob."

I think I already mentioned that my predecessor had joined the marines, my predecessor in my same job, and ended up, strangely enough, in Puerto Rico doing some very fine work. I hadn't met him before Puerto Rico, and we got very well acquainted. Very nice guy. He did one of those--remember Rockefeller did a series of very fancy beach resorts? One was in the Virgin Islands, and one the Puerto Rican one was there, and it really was luxurious. Betty and I some years later were able to stay there two days, and he was the architect for that. But I digress.

So, Carl put in for officer training in the navy, and I thought maybe I ought to do the same. I didn't hear anything for a month or so, and neither did Carl. Then, wow, they were starting to draft married men. Well, it got to the point, I was one week away from reporting to the Great Lakes Training Station to be a sailor, not an officer. [laughs] It looked like that was it; there was nothing to be done about it. I forget--Carl had the baby, you see, so that stalled him a little bit. But mine didn't.

And then, one week before I was to leave, it came out that married men over thirty were not going to be drafted at this time. So we relaxed, for a while.

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DeMars: Then it was several months later when, in the mail one day, I got a little black photostat. (They just sent you the negative; they didn't bother making the white copy.) It said: "Greetings!" [laughter] Signed by Franklin Roosevelt at the bottom. "Your application to have officer training has been accepted." I forget what else it told. "We congratulate you on your volunteering..."

Riess: Could you have changed your mind at that point?

DeMars: I think I could have, yes. I guess I'd gotten to the point where I thought somehow I should be in this thing. I had a feeling that--

Riess: It didn't seem like it was about to end, the war.

DeMars: No. And well, it went on for another year. I crossed my fingers --I guess I'm kind of a gambler--that I'd come back with my head on. Then I had a couple of weeks, maybe even longer than that, to get my affairs together, and send Betty back to California. In fact, I think I had enough time that we went back together before I had to report. I think that's the way it worked.

I bought my uniforms in Washington, and the experience there I remember. You had almost a regular issue for your blues and your whites and so forth, and then they provide the thing that made you look like a mailman, in a blue-grey battleship color. I can see that lined up on the deck it would look like there was nobody there, so no use machine-gunning them! [laughs]

But it was suggested that one ought to get a tailor-made light tan uniform. I went to this fancy tailor, got a tailor-made suit, and Betty said, "You've never looked better in your life! You've got to get a tailor-made suit again when the war is over!" [laughing] I remember standing in the place--there were a lot of other guys around being measured-- and someone said, "Lieutenant." I looked around. "Oh, me!" I was a lieutenant j.g., junior grade, which is the equivalent of a first lieutenant in the army.

Riess: Your tour of duty was what? In brief, what did you do?

Bluebeard's Castle, St.
Thomas, V.I. May 17, 1946

Betty DeLuars and Lieut.
Vernon DeLuars, Naval
Aide to The Governor of
Puerto Rico, Raymond G.
Tugwell, at the recep-
tion following the in-
auguration of Judge
William Hastie as the
first black governor
of the Virgin Islands.



Walter Peckard and another
member of the Tugwell Staff
with Betty DeLuars on the
balcony of Government House
preceding the inauguration
of the new governor.

"Bluebeard's Castle" on the
Hill beyond, now a grand
Hotel.

V. DeLu.
7/15/92

DeMars: I reported to Princeton, New Jersey for eight weeks where they turned you into an officer and a gentleman. It turned out that Betty [Bauer] Mock--first Catherine and Betty--lived in Princeton, and their house was just down the street. Catherine [Bauer] had already gone west, but I knew Betty quite well, and we'd had these various things done by the museum [Museum of Modern Art], and I knew the people at the museum and so forth.

So, on weekends, what happened? Each weekend--I think you were there Saturday morning, and then Saturday afternoon you were off. But before this they'd give you two or three shots. That was first thing in the morning that you got the shots, and then you'd get packed up, go to New York, and raise hell, you see. Overnight, be back for Monday morning.

Well, whatever the shots they gave me each time, I'd have it by that afternoon, or late in the afternoon. I don't think I ever did get out of town. A couple of times we rented bikes, Betty and I, and rode into the countryside, and it was very nice. And this one time, whatever it was--typhoid or whatever else--I had it coming on strong before we got back to the house. I had to walk the last couple of blocks, and they sent for an ambulance. They had me put to bed there, I had a fever and everything.

Riess: Terrible! So, then, what did you do for your country?

DeMars: Well, this is kind of interesting. You were interviewed for your assignment, first sea duty and then shore duty. I guess some of my background with Farm Security was on my record, but that wasn't held against me before this time. [laughs] But when this guy, an officer probably my same age or younger, maybe, or in there someplace, said, "Say, we haven't had anyone with your kind of experience! You've got to sign up for military government--emergency housing, emergency sewage disposal plants, and all this stuff." (I didn't have much to do with that, but it was down on the list.)

"Would I sign up for military government?" I hadn't thought of it before. "Yes, I certainly will, sure." Then, "What sea duty?" "Well, I'd like a battleship, or a destroyer, or something."

A couple of weeks later--this had to be on our last week of training--they'd gone through this thing. And I swear that the navy's assumption is that their training makes every one of them equally useful in any position, you see. I didn't get a battleship or anything, or a destroyer.

You get a little telegram thing. We all lined up, very nervously, and you open it up, and it's all written in a kind of a lingo that they use--we're supposed to have learned this. It said, "Dip thong cot clamb deth rep" [laughter] Some code. "AOG 45 USS Yacona." It meant that you reported to new construction, AOG. What's an AOG? Auxiliary Oiler, Gasoline, sea type. That is, not a yard oiler, that's another kind. But it wasn't much bigger than that.

There was new construction being built in Sailor's Snug Harbor on Staten Island, New York, and I was to report there. But first we had leave for maybe a week. So I would go back to California. And then I was to report after that to a submarine base in Connecticut, Norwalk, I guess. When I came back east I went to New York, changed trains and so forth, went to Norwalk. It was maybe mid-afternoon when I got there.

"Oh, yes. Well, no, this is wrong. You were supposed to go to Miami, to the subchaser training center"--these are the PT boats, and so forth--"for further training." So I got on the train to Miami. They gave me time enough to get a train. Since I was going to be there for so long, six or eight weeks, I sent for Betty. We rented a little house in Miami Beach, and as long as I was at station at 8 a.m. for the--I had to call the roll, or take turns doing it--.

Riess: Sounds pleasant.

DeMars: Well, I had to get up before breakfast to do it!

Oh, and another thing--I'll try to collapse this together--I was assigned to be the gunnery officer. I hate guns! I got a Boy Scout merit badge using a .22, but I never was a deer killer and all that kind of thing. I could have done it, I guess. But oh, God, they give me the books I had to read, and storing the dynamite and temperatures and all this--I was getting more and more miserable. I thought, how did I get into this?

Lieutenant JG DeMars, Navigator

DeMars: Then, picking the rest of the crew--. The executive officer is the man under the captain, and since this was a tanker, he was an engineering kind of specialist, and in this particular case what he was was a warrant officer. He'd come up through the ranks, you see, and he was a carpenter's mate. But he also had been involved in machinery and so forth. As the executive officer he was

supposed to be the navigator on the ship. I met him, and when this was being given out, and he was grumbling around, and they talked about how he would go to New York and take this course in navigation, he said, "Well, they can take that job and stuff it. I ain't going to New York."

So, they got their heads together. I was a lieutenant j.g. and there was an ensign--that's the same as second lieutenant--and he would be the gunnery officer, and the executive officer would have some other duties, but he wouldn't do the navigating, and DeMars would be the navigator! This pleased me a great deal.

The next thing--. I think I'd sent Betty home, but because we were about to move up to New York, where we would be for eight weeks while they finished building the ship, she came back, and during this period we lived in the Henry Hudson Hotel, right off Central Park. That had been a cooperative apartment house of some sort. We were right around the corner from the Clarence Steins, where they were, right at the corner of Central Park, and we saw a good deal of them.

Riess: Okay. Now, you've got to move this along.

DeMars: Yes, I will. I'd go down to Number 12 Church Street, or wherever that is, and take these courses which typically they give by correspondence. In fact, one of the jobs of the navigator on the ship was to get the courses, pass them out, and send them to the central place in New York where they'd then correct them and send them back.

The sailors could take courses in all kinds of things. Now, typically, there would be one course, engineering navigation, and you'd send it in, they would correct it, send it back, and you'd get the next one. So this could go on for a year, see. Well, they did this training in eight weeks. I would do three or four of these a day, and I was sitting there with all these WACs, these gals--there were about a dozen WACs doing all this. [laughs] I got to be their guinea pig sort of, and I'd do it, and they'd explain it, which was helpful in this particular case.

Anyway, I was trained to be the navigator--I'll try to wind this up--and Betty went back to California. The ship was commissioned. There was an old drunken admiral or something who came aboard [for the commissioning]. One of the things he said was, "We want to make this ship a fighting ship. Hic!" [laughter]

The commissioning was at Coney Island. The ship was such a dumpy ship--maybe it was 150 feet long, or maybe 200 or something.

It was built on the ways, and it was small enough that there were two of them being built on the same ways, one behind the other, you see. Ours got finished first, and slid off, and when they were ready to launch the other one, it slid off from behind, one week behind us. I think then they towed it to Coney Island, where there were some yards, I don't know where they were, where the scenic railway was.

We got a mimeographed sheet which came with the ship telling the changes that you make. For instance, on the bridge there is a--

Riess: You mean design changes?

DeMars: Design changes, yes. And what we had to do was, by getting cartons of cigarettes, you get the workmen to stop playing pinocle in the bridge, and they take an acetylene torch and cut off this step which has been built in according to the specifications, and replace it with a lower one. And we had to bribe a guy to make some shelves.

The navigator's assistant is a young sailor called quartermaster. (I don't know why there is a quartermaster corps which is different.) But he is involved with the signalmen, and with signals, and with keeping the chronometers, and so forth. I knew more about navigation, technically, but I hadn't really done much yet. This was a kid from Palo Alto Junior High, and all the rest of them were from Brooklyn and so forth. So right away, this was my young son, you see. We were pals and buddies, and he was a very nice kid.

He had little mimeographed forms made up that when you did the star sights at night for positioning you simply--you fill this in with the time, the angle from your sextant, and then you got these books out, you added this up, you did the--. It sort of was a diagrammatic way of what to do next in the sequence, even though you're supposed to have known it. And then at the end of it, you had the information. Someone had shown him this in another place; he'd had these made up. Things of that sort were a great help.

After Coney Island and this part we headed out to sea for our shakedown cruise. The first night we're going down the coast of New Jersey, and the captain says, "Get me a position, Mr. DeMars!" I think I did get a star sight, and we worked frantically on it. (Even when we got good, it took about twenty minutes to do this whole business.) When I worked out our position, we were about fifteen miles inside New Jersey. The captain said, "Well, you're doing something wrong. I don't know what it is, but you're doing something wrong." [laughter] You have to get these star sights

when it's just dusk, when the first stars come out, because you have to still be able to see the horizon. We were still in sight of shore at this first part.

Riess: Your shakedown sounds a little rough.

DeMars: Yes, it was.

We got down into Chesapeake Bay and did various exercises. As we came out, the other ship, a week later, was coming in. It looked like a water spaniel just paddling along, because the water was right up to here. I mean, it was a dumpy looking ship. We realized that's what we looked like, this fighting ship, you see. And God, what a depressed crew we were! We had a three-inch gun on the rear deck, and we had four anti-aircraft fifty millimeters. That was our armament, you see. It was a little self-protection.

But anyway, we sailed out, sailing down the coast, and now we're out of sight of shore and with lights out, because there were submarines actually off the coast there. We got into a storm, and we were going back and forth, zigzagging and everything else for evasive action from submarines! We were supposed to pass a certain buoy at a certain point, and we could tell by the time, by so-called dead reckoning, that it should be coming in sight. We saw it, flickering out this way.

All of a sudden--and it was drizzling, and some rain--there was a lookout on the bow and he yells out, "Lights on the port bow," or something. He sees a ship coming. The captain yells out--we're all up in the cabin here, because it's raining and everything else--"Hard left to the wheel," and so forth. This ship tips over to the side, and stuff slides off and everything else. We go on, and I swear we just missed this. It was a destroyer or something. We all turned--they turned all the lights on for a moment, you see, both of them--we may have been two blocks away. I don't think so; I think we were much closer.

We began looking for the buoy again, when this quieted down. We couldn't see it behind, or anyplace else. I think we hit it, because we got a notice--every week the quartermaster would open these things, telling about navigational aids which have been modified, added, or something. And it listed the buoy at such-and-such point had disappeared. [laughter]

I can wind this up very quickly. What happened, we're getting about a day's sail from Miami, heading for the canal, and for the South Pacific, and we get a radio message that one of the two ships is to put in at Miami Harbor to serve as a school ship,

and the other is to proceed to the canal and so forth. Well, we put into Miami. And the other ship went to the South Pacific.

During the last part of the shakedown, while we were still in New York, we would see the other crew because we went to the yard a couple of times. Later we received a long, sad letter. It was like Mr. Roberts's thing, they were delivering toilet paper--. He was at the signing of the surrender along with the battleship Missouri, except it was happening in this harbor, and they were way out, they could barely see the masts from a distance. That's their degree of participation in the event. He was wondering--I guess he knew we were in Miami, and not suffering greatly.

There's a little bit more to that, that we'll get out.

To La Fortaleza. San Juan. Puerto Rico

DeMars: Earlier, when I had already sort of signed up and I'd received the "greetings" and I hadn't made up my mind quite, the secretary [at the housing standards office] said, "There is someone here who says he's the governor of Puerto Rico who wants to talk to you." I said, "Well, tell him I'm busy talking to the president of Uganda," or some other such smart-aleck remark, you see. She didn't tell him that.

She must have asked some question or other, and she said, "It's [Rex] Tugwell." I jumped and grabbed the phone. Now, I had met Tugwell when we were building the Telesis exhibit. We had this visit from him, and he was out in San Francisco at that time. Of course, I knew about him and Walter Packard being down there in Puerto Rico at the time.

Tugwell said that he was trying to fill out a staff for Packard. They'd gotten some planners down there, and Packard was working on trying to resettle the jibaros [peasants] and coffee pickers on some pieces of land which were being given them. But they had really no facilities for housing or even utilities or whatever. Others were doing mapping of these lands and so on, but he asked Walter who he would like to get down, and he said, "I'd like to get Vernon down here."

He tells me this and I said, "Well, I am just about to go into the navy," and I think we talked a bit about it. I had a nervous feeling I should go through with what I'd started. I told him that I really thought it had gone too far, I thought that I

should do it. He understood, and so that was the end of that at that time.

But then when it came up a year later, after my tour of duty in Miami, where I got Betty to come back again for the second time, then I was about to get a transfer and I don't know how we got in touch, but Packard said, "We still want you." Oh, I know, the war was over by then, both Europe and Japan, and so I thought with this that I could probably just resign and go down there to Puerto Rico. "Oh, no, two years I had signed up for."

I passed this news back to them and the message I got was that they would try to get me out of the navy, because of this government duty, and the very special circumstances, and my particular abilities in that area, you see. And so on. Then the navy said back--I didn't hear them say it--but must have said, "Oh, no, Mr. DeMars is much too valuable to the navy, we've expended these funds for training him and so forth. No, we can't let him go."

So then Tugwell's aide--have I told you this story?

Riess: No.

DeMars: Well, he had a naval aide. He was the only one of the territorial governors--I mean, not Guam and the others--the governor of Puerto Rico is the only one that has a military aide and a naval aide. (I'll tell you more about that later.)

Tugwell's aide then, an attorney, Tom Carlin, he was being assigned to the Nuremberg Trials as one of the attorneys on it. That was quite a coup. He was leaving very shortly, and Tugwell said, "I was going to just let it go, I don't need a naval aide, but that would be a way to get you down here, so would that be satisfactory to you?"

I said, "Sure!" So they did.

Riess: So you became the Ayudante--

DeMars: Ayudante Navale por el Gobernador de Puerto Rico.

[Interview 8: March 2, 1989]##

Riess: You mentioned official lunches with Tugwell at La Fortaleza. La Fortaleza is the official residence?

DeMars: Of the governors, since Ponce de Leon. And as a matter of fact, there's an old engraving that they have there. Ponce--that had to

be in the 1500s, didn't it? It was not long after Columbus. It was a typical medieval fortress keep with two round towers and battlements on the top, and then a solid wall and an enclosed square behind. It wasn't as elaborate as Carcassonne or that kind of thing, but quite a tall pair of towers, and then right on the sloping beach. Probably by the 17th century or so they elaborated a bit, and it got to be a little bit less of a fortress itself, but there were residential facilities.

The main walls I think they were built in the 16th and 17th century, and apparently the most--. I think the fortifications that are on San Juan were more elaborate than those in Cuba, and it was the port the ships made a run for. And it has a splendid harbor inside. You go through a kind of a gap, and there's this harbor that would take plenty of galleons and things.

These towers must have been nearly 100 feet high. During the later centuries they built these Vauban type fortifications. You see them in many of the cities, with the great star-shaped things going in and out. ([Sebastien de] Vauban was a Frenchman who was an engineer.) There were placements for cannons on the top of them, quite a broad area, and sloping sides going up. At every corner would be one of these sentinel posts. I've got Kodachromes of them.

These went sort of halfway up, you might say up to the beltline. So there was only about fifty feet of the original two towers sticking up above the top. They were huge things. Those are all quite intact. Right near Fortaleza was the water gate, so there was an entrance there, and a place where ships could send lighters ashore, and a kind of a dock thing, and then the gateway which could be closed at both ends.

These embrasures for cannons went right around, block after block, with many of them in later times like what we had off the Golden Gate here. Here would be this piece of metal track on the back where the wheel is to run, to turn it around. They couldn't turn it very far, because it was this great long slot that came out through here.

Apparently the city was never taken from the sea. The walls were too impregnable. But it was finally attacked from land, the Drake attack of San Juan. It was under siege for I don't know how many days, and the shot--. There's a little fort at the other end on the land side of the island, but it's on a little piece of island there, and a shot from that hit the flagship and killed the captain, I think it was. Not Drake; he was the admiral of the fleet. On that, they turned around and left.

Housing Jibaros

Riess: What did you do in Puerto Rico?

DeMars: I told you how it happened that Tugwell had me assigned as his naval aide as a means of leaving me in the navy, but getting me assigned to him. So my soul was still owned by the navy, but in fact I could work on whatever the governor wanted me to work on, since I was his naval aide.

I had a little office--well, it was just a large place with a drafting table and things--and I was really working with Packard on different ways of trying to improve the lot of the so-called jibaros, or you might say the itinerant farmworkers in this country. Earlier on, they were simply farm labor, but they were trying to give them a little plot of land, and they were breaking up some of the big estates. Not the biggest big estates, this is another--did I mention this one too?

At one of the luncheons at Fortaleza was Munoz Marin. He later became the first Latin governor of the island since the American occupation, because when Tugwell left, he was the last of the American governors since the Spanish-American War. They had a listing someplace, Ponce de Leon, the first governor, and then on through the times. Also at that luncheon was Jaime Benitez, who was the chancellor of the university, I think a relative of Munoz Marin. Munoz Marin was the son of the sort of George Washington of Puerto Rico, against the Spaniards and so on. He was kind of their national hero.

Riess: So what happened at lunch?

DeMars: At lunchtime the discussion came about the land division and so forth. Benitez was pushing the point of getting on with this thing; there were some of these big estates which you could break up, you see. And Munoz was arguing that it wasn't the right time to break it up into small plots. And that if you start trying to break it up into medium-sized plots, then instead of one terribly rich family to deal with, you'd have a couple of dozen medium-rich ones to deal with at a later date. He felt it would be better to wait until they were ready to do whatever it was. It was an interesting conversation.

Riess: You were telling me what the work was that you were doing.

DeMars: The work that I was doing with Packard--and I forget what Packard's title was--was sort of exploratory. He was working with some agricultural group there, and with the planning people as well. (And incidentally, while we were down there, and very early in my whole stay there, the school of business administration [of the University of San Jan] was going to be established. There was a great deal of contact with the university and getting curricula in planning--even the school of architecture was involved.)

There were a group of planners from the U.S. brought in as consultants to the planning office. They kept having consultants, and they were referred as perritos--that's a consultant. Perro is a dog--perritos, little dogs? I'm not quite sure whether it has the double R in it or not. One of them was quite an authority, and it was one of the names that you'd hear very much in the whole planning field. I was with him on a tour through the planning office.

The planning staff of Puerto Rico was in a five-story building with I don't know how many personnel in the whole place. It was vastly bigger than San Francisco's. (Well, San Francisco even after Telesis still didn't have a very big planning staff.) But there were parts of Puerto Rico that hadn't been mapped completely, and there were all kinds of basic things that needed doing. He [the consultant] was much impressed, and said he didn't know even of New York City having such an activity going on. So, I was impressed too.

I would sit in at the meeting the governor had with what would have been his cabinet, and they were the heads of all the different departments and so on. It would be held in La Fortaleza. I was just there as a kind of observer. I was also his deputy for the Committee para Obras Publicas--the Committee of Public Works. They would have a once-a-week meeting, and I would attend those to listen in.

Riess: If there was a five-story building full of planners, wouldn't they be able to house the jibaros? Didn't they have architects of their own?

DeMars: Oh, no, these jibaros were unrepresented people. They had, at that time, divided the land up just sort of into square parcels, almost like the old homestead thing, and maybe given them an acre or so. They had some primitive water system, no plumbing really. They had a manufactured metal privy that they were placing here. It was rather rudimentary. The next stage of it, on the crossings of four of these lots they had a little outhouse construction, with water and other facilities. That's what we took on, and we

were trying to go a few steps further and see if we couldn't do a very elementary house.

Tugwell had this very interesting idea that instead of the typical costly construction of concrete block to withstand the hurricanes, you'd have a much cheaper light frame house and a cyclone cellar if the hurricane hit your area. Then you'd have a general insurance for the whole island that could immediately replace those houses that were destroyed. His idea was that you could make a little house of very light construction, and it doesn't have to be insulated or anything, you see, it wouldn't even have glass windows, because typically everything is open all the time. You're trying to get the breezes through to keep it cool. These would be mass produced, and the thought was that they might use the products which they burned when they cut the sugar cane, and it was called bagasse. They can make a board out of it. I forget whether they did, but this was at least being discussed.

We saw the kind of houses that they did for themselves, which was almost our approach when we did the first houses in Farm Security, and they did a rather cute little house. These are the ones on the urban outskirts where they had enough money to do it. They were usually up on stilts, because the land went up and down, so maybe one end might hit the ground back here, or it would be a couple of feet up to get ventilation under as well, and it would be up on posts. There would always be a little porch cut into the corner. And they painted them really marvelous colors. That kind of red and that kind of green, and pink, and all this sort of thing.

It seemed to me that one could--I was going to propose that it would be a slightly enlarged adaption of the cabins we'd been doing for Farm Security, which typically for a family was twelve feet by sixteen. Well, this might be twelve by maybe eighteen. And we worked out one plumbing line that went to kind of a sink in the kitchen, and another T that came out with a shower outside, and other things like this. And a very rudimentary couple of rooms, at least so the parents have a little privacy. And there would be flaps which would be propped up for windows. I added the notion of some coiled-up wire or cables tucked under the eaves that you'd take down to some anchors around the house when the hurricane was scheduled to hit your area. Up to a certain point it might save the house from being blown away.

Riess: And did it happen?

DeMars: Well, we made a little model, and I had a draftsman, and we worked some things out. By the time it got to this stage, it was just about the time I was leaving. I asked Mrs. Tugwell, when I saw

her just a few months ago, whether they'd ever followed through on this, and she said she thought they had.

Visiting Dignitaries

Riess: In the early fifties you went to Puerto Rico again.

DeMars: Yes, right. But I didn't see any evidence of this other thing, and I was mostly being herded around to see the urban housing things under the housing program. Looking back on it, they had me on such a busy schedule to see this project and that project and so forth.

[interruption]

Riess: You installed an exhibition on the works of the Committee para Designo de Obras Publicas?

DeMars: Yes, "for the Design of Public Works." This draftsman guy that I had helped put it together with me, and Brandon Howell, part of the time when he wasn't working. I think between us we designed the thing, and consulted with some of the people on it. We had a couple of nights, and it was mainly to show some of the social programs going on. We showed the organization, who had to be consulted, and who had an input, and so on. We tried to explain how this all worked.

Riess: Who was to come and see this?

DeMars: It would be the public, and it was actually set up in the capitol, on the rotunda floor, and we had some panels around. Probably it had some influence from the Telesis exhibit to try to explain the machinery of government, and how a project of this sort went through these processes, and the people who had the input to make it work, and the different approvals it had to have. Finally we showed a great set of plans [the Ponce Hospital] partially rolled back, and they could look at some if they wanted to.

Riess: You mentioned another story, of [Fiorella] La Guardia and the ambassador to Brazil both appearing in San Juan at one point?

DeMars: Yes. Tugwell had an appointments secretary and another secretary and there was a lot of general consternation going on. It was very late in the day at La Forteleza that we heard about it, and they just decided that there wasn't much they could do about this with Tugwell out. So I told Brandon Howell--and I forget how I

saw him, maybe I got in touch with him--I think I said, "Gee, it seems to me that if La Guardia is coming through here, and the ambassador [Adolph Berle] is expecting to make a visit, they should certainly meet the president of the senate, Munoz Marin."

Howell knew Munoz, and I had met him several times. He knew who I was. We tried to get in touch with him. He had a country house some miles out of San Juan itself and there were no phones. That was purposeful on his part. He wanted to retire there, and talk with friends, and so on, and didn't want to have them track him down. This place was at a distance, like Richmond from here, but you had to go around a piece of the peninsula. I had a car available for official business, and this certainly was official we thought, so we decided we should drive out there and tell him about it.

As I say, the news came at the end of the day. The airplane had come down, and they were leaving the next afternoon. We drove out, and it got dark. I don't know how we found the roadway, but we went up this dirt road, and here was a gate and some guys with Tommy-guns. [laughs] I was in uniform, of course, but the one I described to you, just the shirt and so forth. We were able to convince them. One of them went up to the house, and Munoz must have said, "Sure, let them in."

So I drove my Model--was it a T or an A? It was old--the very first model thing. Here under a big light hanging from trees at a great big table were Munoz, and I think Benitez, and his brother-in-law or something, and three or four other people. They were drinking red wine and talking about a lot of things.

We gave him the message, and he was interested and so forth. He would come in the next day. I don't remember that they had lunch, actually. It may have been that he came in in the morning, and they were leaving. But they did come to La Fortaleza, and met, and had a conversation. Everyone seemed to be interested. And of course, I was fascinated to meet La Guardia.

Riess: It's funny to think about you Americans being errand-boys, you and Brandon Howell driving out to deliver a message.

DeMars: Well, it was a little less formal. It wasn't the president of the United States, with an entourage.

Riess: The American presence in Puerto Rico seems a little peculiar, maybe as we look back at it.

DeMars: Well, yes. And of course, they've gotten less of it as time has moved on. But again, this was their source of expertise to an

extent, which they both would complain about, but then also when they needed it would send for.

Richard Neutra

DeMars: One of the things when I first went down there, I learned that Neutra had been picked to design the hospital for Ponce. Ponce is the other big city on the other side of the island. It was well along, and I met the two young architects that were working with him. They were sort of in charge of the drafting room, and I guess there was a staff of maybe half a dozen draftsmen. They'd all been trained in the states.

Riess: In Los Angeles with Neutra?

DeMars: No, not necessarily. I think they were in the east, but then Neutra was brought in to be the architect.

When I met them--and we got acquainted very soon--my name was familiar to them through some of the publications in the Architectural Forum, and so forth. We sort of got along. Their firm name was Toro and Ferrer, and the Ferrer was the brother of the actor, Jose. I can't remember his first name. As soon as I met them, and as soon as we got a little acquainted, they were telling me that there was a great flap going on with Neutra, because Neutra--there was some controversy about the design. Neutra wanted them to sign an oath that they would be loyal to him. They were appalled at the notion, and weren't going to do it, and it really sounded--.

Neutra was so insecure, I'd met him a couple of times here. I remember one time talking to Catherine Wurster about it, and Bill--well, the three of us were talking, and maybe a couple of other people. She had suggested, "You two have never had an insecure moment in your lives, and here Neutra comes out of Germany, and doesn't know how far he's accepted, and so on, and you have to forgive him a little bit of paranoia about these things."

Riess: In your encounters with Neutra, did you feel it?

DeMars: Yes, a bit, and in fact once we brought him up to the school here in Berkeley to lecture, and he made a point that it was "about time," that he's been available all this time, and it's a rather late date to invite him up. He would bring this kind of a thing out, and it was rather strange. He usually had Mrs. Neutra--she

played the cello, I think--and she very often ran interference for him.

Riess: You also met Eric Mendelsohn. Was there the same feeling?

DeMars: No. Mendelsohn--and I think Mendelsohn had a rougher time than Neutra. Did Neutra leave with the beginning of the Nazi business? I thought he came earlier. But Mendelsohn left the night before they came and ransacked his office, and so on, and he got out of the city with a stamp collection and a few gold coins in his pockets, and went to England. And he never made any references to that, or whatever other peculiarities he possessed.

I talked with him for a while on my first job, when Bill got back as dean here. In fact, I think it was before; I think it was when Warren Perry was still the dean, and before Wurster came out, that they'd gotten Mendelsohn to teach the graduate course. They had an excessively large class, and he just said that he couldn't handle twenty-four students, he absolutely couldn't, so I was assigned to assist him. So I did.

Now, back to Puerto Rico, and Neutra. This was going to be one of the biggest projects of the time, doing this hospital. I think that Neutra wasn't there for very long; they terminated his contract or something. And it was far enough along that Toro and Ferrer I think perhaps carried the thing through. Then later on, after we'd left, they were the ones that built the first of the resort hotels, the Caribe Hilton. A very interesting design, right on the seafront, and right next to this fort where they shot at Drake's ship and killed the captain. When you're up on the upper stories you can look down on the little spit of land that went out to this island.

##

Rex Tugwell Stories

Riess: You had known Brandon Howell earlier in Telesis?

DeMars: Yes, he was a planner. He was working in the planning department there. Brandon died about a year ago in England. He married an English girl later, leaving the one that we knew in Puerto Rico, so I guess it's all right to give you my, not suspicions but my assumption, that he was probably a card-carrying member of the party.

One time there was a large reception at La Fortaleza, and often when they had a large group to entertain, they did it on the top of these 16th century walls. It had been paved over with a terrazzo surface, and they could have dances. It was quite wide; I would say it was about thirty feet wide, the top of the wall. Munoz Marin was there, and all of the senators and so forth. I invited Brandon and his wife to the thing. I was allowed to invite someone.

We went up to talk to Munoz Marin. I introduced Brandon Howell, and he said, "Yes, I know Mr. Howell, and he knows me. And there are some things we agree on, and there are some other things we don't agree on at all. Aren't there?" he says to him. And I think that's what it was.

I should interject here that Munoz Marin, I guess he was born in Puerto Rico, but he had gone to New York and worked in--he was a newspaper man in Brooklyn. Everyone said he spoke Spanish with a Brooklyn accent. [laughter] So English came easily. But that was after.

Before we leave Puerto Rico, I think it was just the last week or so, I went and talked to the governor, and he was about to leave also. He was about to become the head of a planning department at the University of Chicago, if not the planning department, a similar position. And he offered me a job to come and teach there.

Looking back on it, I said, "Oh, thank you very much, but Chicago?" I forget how I said it. I think it may have hurt his feelings a little bit, but we wanted to get back to California where we hadn't been for six years, practically. That was my plan to get back here. I'm afraid I didn't seem to be grateful at the suggestion. I thought it over later, and I was flattered that he would consider it, and I thanked him profusely. But, "Thank you, but no thanks." [laughs]

Riess: In fact, what did you want very much to be doing at that point, building?

DeMars: My thought was we'd return to California, and I just wanted to go into practice. I assumed I'd be--. Probably when I first got back I don't know whether I thought I'd be working with somebody else or what.

Well, the first thing I was going to do--oh, we were going to buy a lot, and we were going to--of course, now that happened after Bannockburn. [thinking] We would get back, put our lives together again on the West Coast. We wanted to live in Berkeley,

and I'd commute to San Francisco, and would either work for somebody or associate with somebody or form a firm or whatever. I hadn't gotten that far yet. Then the Bannockburn thing came up-- actually before I left Puerto Rico--by correspondence. Carl Koch was one of the people being interviewed, the two of us.

I think we left Puerto Rico only a few days before the Tugwells left. He had some enemies around town. He had kind of a breezy manner, and he also--oh, I've got another story I've got to have in here. He was a great solver--he had ideas that were based on logic and so forth, and then he would get somebody, and he'd explain it to him, and then he wanted them to go out and do it. But then, they wanted to come back and talk to him. This happened with Walter too, who had a hard time getting to him at times. He had a lot of different involvements. He'd say, "That's why I asked you to do it!" [laughter]

So one of the things--I mentioned that he was allowed to have a naval aide, and a military aide, though he didn't need either one of them. In the returning contingent of a militant army group that had fought very bravely in Italy, there was a captain of the company, Angel Martin his name was, who was much honored and decorated and everything else. It was as kind of an award for all this that he was appointed the military aide. But when I first arrived, Tugwell didn't have a military aide.

Riess: He was a Puerto Rican?

DeMars: Yes. We alternated taking the duty on certain nights. There had to be someone there all the time. Just like on shipboard.

Well, one of the things he brought back from Europe was a beautiful ivory chess set that he'd bought, I think in Italy. And did I play chess? I played it well enough to teach somebody the moves, you see, and the general idea, and if it were a fifteen-year-old kid, they would beat me the next game or two. But anyway, so we played a couple of times.

Now, there was a popular thing going around where the governor for relaxation would play Chinese checkers with various people. They would all try to get in to play because then they could talk about the thing they'd been trying to meet him about. So he would sometimes ask so-and-so to play with him, but behind the scene they'd say, "See if you can get me in to play him." Walter did this several times.

We thought, that's sort of a child's game. (I guess the Chinese wouldn't necessarily agree to it, and I'm sure it was elaborate.) But we felt really it was beneath the governor's

dignity. He ought to be playing chess. So we talked to him one time about it. "No, he didn't know chess." Well, the two of us taught him the game, and he was fascinated. So immediately he was playing chess with whoever in the La Fortaleza environs could play chess.

And wow, were we considered the black sheep for teaching him this! [laughter]

Riess: It did clear his calendar, I guess.

DeMars: Yes. We had a picnic one day at a beach that was on the eastern end of the island, a beautiful beach, right below El Junque, the big highest mountain. It was some kind of a holiday, and there was a little contingent of a dozen people with motorcade. Both Martin and I were along. One of the palace guard--I forget what his role was--an American, who was quite a chess expert, he did a thing which I had heard about. He sat with his back to the table, and he'd call out the moves, and they'd call out the move that Tugwell would make. "Queen to pawn three," or whatever. He'd say, "Move such-and-such to such-and-such." He went through this, and beat Tugwell. Everyone was very much amazed.

IX POSTWAR, TEACHING AT MIT AND THE RETURN TO BERKELEY

Alvar Aalto and Vernon DeMars, and Teaching

Riess: Then after the war you stayed in the east, you were at Bannockburn, and you were also teaching at MIT. You were alternating spring and fall semesters with Alvar Aalto. But it wasn't completely alternate; you overlapped sufficiently that you had a lot of time together.

DeMars: At least two of the years. He was there three months, or something like that.

Riess: So some of the time you were up there you overlapped. You shared an office, you and Aalto. You said in the piece that you wrote that you had conversations about politics and the human condition and how the world works.¹

DeMars: And it's funny, looking back on it, I don't remember us ever really just in our vis-a-vis conversations talking about architectural design. We just assumed what the other one--he had some idea of what I did, and I knew what he did. I didn't have to ask him what he thought about this or that. I guess that's the way it worked. He was talking about American politics and about world conditions.

Riess: You wrote that he had complete self-confidence--I'm quoting you--and assurance of where he stood in the scheme of things. Compared to Neutra, for instance? Another famous architect you were acquainted with.

DeMars: Yes. That would be a good comparison. I think Neutra had self-confidence about what he did, even a bit of arrogance. I understand that Aalto's classmates and others--this has been written up by other historians, so that's where I know that--considered him a little arrogant. He must have had some sense of self-confidence when he was

¹See Appendices.

younger than others of his colleagues may have resented a little bit.

Riess: When you have a famous architect teach a design class what do you get?

DeMars: Well, simply the counsel of a recognized important figure in the world of architecture, and his ability to perhaps guide the students or inspire them.

Riess: Will students do buildings that are as much like Aalto's as they possibly can?

DeMars: No, I don't think so. We would be inclined to look down on this. Although Mendelsohn's class here, they were doing Mendelsohnian things, because he would give them the kind of a project which would lead them into that. But I think Aalto was trying to lead them into, "What would you do in this situation?" and would try to guide them and give them criticism. "Why don't you try this," or "Have you tried this?"

Riess: But they would want to find out what he would do in a situation.

DeMars: Well, he undoubtedly lectured, and then he would sit on the juries when you'd judge the students' work. And they were open juries.

When I was in college here it was still in the old Beaux Art system, secret jury, but at MIT then [1948] it was felt that all of this discussion going on between the jury and so forth, it would be interesting if the students could hear it, because that's the essence, and warming it over isn't quite the same thing. In fact, it's nice if they get into an argument, if some members of the faculty disagree. Oh, the students love that.

And so at MIT--whether this was Wurster's idea I don't know, but this was I think already going when I got there--you'd go in, and the rest of the school too, whether they were in that class or not, would come and listen. It would be little pearls of wisdom that Aalto might drop on the way. One of them was with a student who had planned a school, the first couple of grades, a bit above kindergarten. This student was explaining all of these strictly functional things about it, and everything was because of this and this.

Aalto said, "Where is the door for the bear?" There was silence at first, the student totally nonplussed at this. I'm sure they discussed it further. He wanted some whimsy in it for children. But this is the kind of thing he would say.

Riess: Did you have a special way you tried to bring the students out?

DeMars: Yes, sort of. I was trying to get so the students would have something to show after a week. You'd give out the problem, discuss it in detail and so forth, and then what happens, they'd been neglecting all their other work for the big charette at the end, and when the new problem is given out they'd put it aside while they caught up on their physics or whatever. You meet them two days later--well, of course, they haven't even looked at it yet. "I've been thinking about it, you see, and I'm not ready to put anything down on paper yet," which was quite evident.

I would try to get them to plant an idea--. I think Einstein has said that some of his greatest ideas come after he gets himself to understand the problem and puts it aside. In the middle of taking a walk around the lake, suddenly somehow, while he's been sleeping and otherwise, the wheels have been turning, and suddenly it comes. I'd talk about this, that Einstein had done it. I'd tell them to read the program carefully, spend a few more hours seeing if you can get into the problem a bit. Then set it aside, and do your problem set, but come to me next meeting with something.

##

Riess: Let us say you think you have a "brilliant" solution to the problem. Why consider the alternatives?

DeMars: Well, maybe you refine it, maybe you jumped too soon to the conclusion. Usually you have a program written and you discuss it.

Riess: But is this not an intuitive science?

DeMars: Yes, but the intuitive--Aalto talked about that.

Riess: What Aalto said about his work in designing the dormitory [Baker House at MIT] was, "Of course, analysis is necessary, but one comes to an architect for his trained intuition."

DeMars: The student's intuition isn't trained yet, not that much. He will later on be more likely to be able to do that.

Another Finn who was good at winning competitions was Eero Saarinen, son of Eliel, and who already had a considerable reputation in 1943. We met when I was with the NHA, and he was a consultant to the OAS--very hush-hush, it was never discussed. He had a small architectural office there and was working on a couple of competitions. We and our wives became good friends.

Saarinen's way of winning competitions was to avoid jumping to the conclusion too soon, without trying an alternate. It might be an elaborate kind of a thing, and you ought to try to make yourself modify the conditions or something to see if there's an alternative that leads into an alternate actual concept, an alternate design that you look at and say, "Well, this is better, isn't it? If I'd stuck with that other one I'd have lost the competition."

We did this on the student center. We made ourselves try a number of alternates that were each explainable. It isn't always completely pat. And sometimes you're searching for the things to fall together. You have all the parts, or a lot of parts. You really have to experiment with seeing how it goes together before you want to conclude, and don't get zeroed in on it too soon.

In my teaching I find some students who do jump at something right away, and you can't budge them off of this. Then you're inclined to say, "Well, have you done this?" Then there are other students who can't zero in on anything, or won't. They try this and that, and the next time they come it's off on another tack.

This was a thing which the Beaux Arts system was trying to get them off of, to wean them from that. In their system, they were trying to get you to deal with what might not be a perfect set of pieces going together, because you were going to get this in actual life, but then what can you make of that? That's studying it. I may have talked about that before as well.

Student Problems: A Playhouse Theater

Riess: When you gave problems, did you give problems that were related to the fields that interested you, like housing? I'm thinking of MIT.

DeMars: Yes. There are two things I did there. Very often it was a very rich mix; there would be two professors in some classes. I never taught actually with Aalto, but sometimes I'd be hanging around the general vicinity and hear his discussions with the students.

Riess: By "rich mix" you mean what?

DeMars: Just the fact that sometimes there would be maybe eight students and two professors for that particular class. They got a lot of attention.

Riess: Why two?

DeMars: Well, simply because they were already hired, and it came out that way. Maybe the class was bigger--I think it would have been maybe ten, whereas at Berkeley we might have fifteen. A typical afternoon is four hours, two o'clock to six. To get around and talk to fifteen, they won't all get the same attention.

Riess: Right. You were talking about one particular time at MIT?

DeMars: Yes. One time I thought that it would be interesting for them to take on the problem of a theater. I have talked to you about Clarence Stein. Aline MacMahon, who was his wife, was an actress. We'd talk about the theater; when we'd see them in New York and she was in a play we'd talk about this. (In fact, we saw her in a couple of plays. One production of Galileo, and I forget her role in it.)

She knew a group of Hollywood people who had an organization--it wasn't the Screen Actors Guild quite, but it was a particular group of them--that wanted to do a playhouse theater, which would be both training and--. It would be like A.C.T. in San Francisco now. We talked about it. She had some information on it, but she volunteered to write to them and see if they would put together a program for what their ideal theater of this sort would be. It would include training and all the rest.

Finally, we got the program, and I gave it to this group of graduate students as a problem. Now, when I was being taught, we were given a similar problem, and the idea was to see who solved that problem best. You're competing with all the other people in the class. Well, whether it was my idea I don't know, but at least I did it a couple of times there: we decided to make it a research project, so that they'd start working with this rather complex program, and then we would talk about it. We'd have two or three juries along the way, and there would be original things. We'd compare different students' approaches to it, and they'd defend it.

Sometimes so that more input with discussion could go on, a couple of people would have almost the same kind of idea, and we'd suggest maybe they develop this together. And then the class would almost decide, "What are the greatest opposites of these things, one that does this with the problem, and one that goes off in a completely different direction?" Maybe if two of them are doing the same thing, all right. And we sort of left it open to organize it in this way. But when you got through with it, you had a picture of several different ways to do this thing. They weren't going to get an A for only the one that everyone voted was the best, but for their involvement in the whole process.

Riess: When you gave that theater project assignment, was that the first time that you had been thinking about a theater design?

DeMars: I think so.

Student Problems: A Housing Development for an Insurance Company

DeMars: The second problem that used this same process--and this will fit into something later--. I talked to Lawrence Anderson. He was the assistant head of the department. We were doing this [teaching] together. (I did the theater thing myself, but this was another term.) We were discussing what would be a good problem. I had been thinking some time that it would be interesting--. It was very hot on the scene at the time, this business of the big insurance companies investing in large-scale housing developments as a means of secure investment for the next twenty years or so. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company had done this big project in New York, and then later one here in San Francisco, and they did a similar thing in Los Angeles.

When we were working on the Fort Drive then, and the apartment houses--you saw the one there that Chermayeff had done, the slab building with the floors, and Carl Koch was very much interested in that when we were in Washington. There were so many variants on what was possible, not many of which had been done in this country. The typical New York thing was an x-shaped building, which meant that one wing was looking into the other. Everybody here on one side could practically see into the windows of that wing at right angles to it. One of the other forms was a kind of slab, the next one being perhaps half a block away, zig-zag, offset or whatever. So these were considerations that were addressed in certain other forms.

We gave this problem out, just in those terms: a large insurance company wants to, as an investment, explore some highrise apartment buildings as a long term investment. The buildings and their plans and livability should be twenty years ahead of the time, so as not to be made obsolete by newer ideas coming up. This exercise was to research what are the options. It started off as I described the other one. They were to see who had done what. They studied Corbusier. And one of the things that Corbusier and several had done is an apartment house in which the elevator doesn't stop at every floor, and you might stack up townhouses, two-story units with the bedroom on the second floor.

In Britain they were actually building some of these. On the first floor you would have sometimes an open corridor on the outside, because then you could get cross-ventilation, and the kitchen might open out by your front door, and then the living room would have a

balcony on the other side. Then the bedrooms, you'd go up the stair in the middle and there'd be bedrooms on one side and the other.

That was one of the possibilities they already knew; it wasn't so much that they could reinvent all these things. There were some that had that kind of a business, others that had an elevator every third floor or something, and then I can't remember what some of the others were. So the group of students pursued this. Some of them teamed up, and others didn't. They made their presentations.

Eastgate Apartments. Wurster's Team at MIT

DeMars: Then Andy--Lawrence Anderson--knew this young man [A.O. Willauer] who had just taken a job with the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company. I think he came from business administration, or some such. Andy knew about this and had him on the jury. There were the two of us, he, and maybe one other professor in the department.

It was discussed thoroughly in this jury, and he must have been sufficiently interested in the whole thing, because it was exactly addressing the very problem that he was interested in. I don't know how long afterwards it was, but MIT was going to do some housing for the faculty. A site became available right along the river. It was an old shoe factory. That had been an industrial area, the whole area where MIT is, which faces out on the Charles River. MIT had gotten the site, and they were going to do that.

Apparently this young man came and talked to the president. The president of MIT talked to Bill Wurster to suggest some architects. "Who in Boston would you propose to do this?" Bill said, "Well, I wouldn't go to Boston at all. I've got the brightest young collection of architects right here in my faculty. Otherwise, they wouldn't be here. I think since this is an in-house deal, I would propose this group." He put together five of us.

Riess: Was this a selection of faculty, or the entire architecture faculty?

DeMars: No, it wasn't the entire faculty. It was the younger stripe. It only left a couple of others over.

Riess: And Rapson had the chief responsibility?

DeMars: No. That was the point. There wasn't any chief. The interesting thing was, we already knew about teams and so forth, and someone picking up and running with the ball and being a prima donna. We were all good friends. We had meetings, but there was no chairman.

It didn't occur to us to appoint one, quite, and so nothing was happening much. [laughter]

Bill Wurster met with us at one point, and I can remember the discussion. Professionally, I was less occupied on the outside, because I would come there and I was there all day long for three days of the week. Whereas most of them, they might alternate. Maybe they were there only in the afternoon, and they'd be in their office in the morning. The others had practices. Carl Koch was busy with some of his Tech Built houses at the time.

Riess: So Wurster was trying to whip you into shape.

DeMars: Yes. I remember him saying to Carl Koch, "You and your goddamn ten thousand dollar house. Here's a multi-million dollar project, and all of you are sitting around on your duffs and no one's doing anything about it! If we don't get some action, we'll find some others that can get some." Oh, wow! [laughs] Then we just really got to work on the thing.

We were doing a bit of things of each one going off in different directions to compare notes to see how we could attack the site. I was turning the building into the prevailing breezes, almost like we did in Arizona. It was not to be air conditioned, but you had breezes off the river. So I was proposing the two buildings diagonally placed, as it faced the river, which would face them into the south-west looking out toward Boston.

Carl was going to have a thing in which there were galleries suspended out from the building that you'd go into, and then the bridge would connect you to your unit. It got awfully complicated. Some of us thought it was getting off into a strangely wrong track. Then one of the guys, Brown, was kind of secretary and didn't really have much input in the design, but in the discussions.

Riess: There's Rapson's name, and Kennedy you haven't told me about.

DeMars: Kennedy was a thoughtful guy, and wrote rather well. He did a book called The House and the Art of its Design, or something like that. This was against "Home." He had some input on configuration.

It sort of turned out that Carl would throw his hands up if we didn't follow his direction. I would say his input into it was less. How have I listed that in my numbers?

Riess: Well, Rapson has 50 percent. You said Carl had 10 percent, and you had 25 percent.

DeMars: Yes.

Riess: So this is after the fact you're judging the influence?

DeMars: Yes. Influence, and even kind of participation, even though it would be all a committee kind of thing at times.

Riess: Sounds like you're saying it really didn't work terribly well.

DeMars: In a way, having that many--. But Bill thought the results were so great that he did the same thing when he got here on Wurster Hall, you see. And there was the same problem, because if he had told us that Esherick was going to be--I assumed that the working drawings were going to be done in my office because it was right in Berkeley. I had a large office, staff.

Riess: So maybe the problem is all the assumptions that existed in Wurster's mind in both situations.

DeMars: Well, I think he was pleased with the results in both cases.

Riess: It sounds like he was also pleased with the kind of energy that he managed to stir up.

DeMars: I think that was partially it, too.

I don't know whether you'd say Wurster Hall suffered. There are people who think it's the worst-looking building on the campus, and others like it. But it ended up that we had to turn it over to one guy to kind of run it through. Well, you know about the influences and things.²

In the case of MIT, Rapson didn't have a large practice there. He had a little more time, and was almost assigned--. We would meet, and then he would work on it till the next meeting. We decided to let him--. We all admired his skills and his capabilities. He was always winning prizes--the magazines had these competitions for the small house, the this, the that. He drew very well. And you know, he had only one hand; it was some fire or something, and I think it was his left hand that he had left. He didn't have any prosthesis or anything of the sort, and he drew with a scripto pencil, because you can keep grinding the lead out. He just drew beautifully, and he could push a draft thing around with the little end of his--

Riess: So he ended up taking on the actual job?

²See Chapter XIV.

DeMars: Putting it down. The guy holding the paintbrush, or the pencil, has a lot of influence. He did. But he also had suggestions that came.

Riess: Are you pleased with the MIT dormitory building?

DeMars: Yes, I am. I think one interesting thing was we found that there was only one example of a skip-stop apartment house in the country. On the outside of the building, there was no evidence. You saw these windows and things on the outside. The fact that the elevator stopped at every other floor you couldn't tell. We thought that it took a bit of doing to do it this way, but whoever designed that first building didn't want it even known.

We weren't exactly trying to make anything undue out of it. Carl Koch would have. He wanted to express this, so it looked like a thing totally built on Mars. It should express it. Well, it is expressed on the north side; you see the hallways which stop every third floor. But in use, what you do is--.

I can explain it in a hurry. Your entranceway goes into a little apartment off this floor. Or, the next doorway has a number, maybe it's the same floor, and it goes into a little vestibule, and when you're in the vestibule, coats and storage, you go up the stairs. You're in the middle of this apartment that has windows on both sides of the building. Or, the other vestibule, you go down a stair, and that apartment goes clear through. The apartment that has a hall on the outside is only a one-bedroom apartment. The others are two-bedrooms, and at certain joints there are three-bedrooms. So you've got quite a mix in there.

There are people who have gone there and didn't notice anything peculiar about it at all; to walk into a little foyer and walk up some stairs seemed perfectly normal. And what it does is it saves all the area of the hallways, it speeds up the elevator thing, because it only stops every third floor. So, in this thirteen-story building, there are about four stops.

Riess: Has it been copied?

DeMars: I don't think it has. [laughs]

Riess: And speaking of that, has Aalto's serpentine dormitory ever been copied? He had such a convincing argument for why it was the perfect design. Why didn't you, for instance, want to do the serpentine shape along the Charles River if it was such a great shape for a dormitory?

- DeMars: Well, I think on the dormitory thing, you have this series of small elements, the small rooms. The hallways in his become kind of a social gathering place. The stairways.
- Riess: There's not a way you could have worked with that shape?
- DeMars: We would have assumed it would cost more, which probably didn't matter in the one case, but in the other case, it would reflect in the rents. One was being done for a university in which the bottom line didn't necessarily have to show, and the other, there was no question that it had to pay. When we got started they had already-- this wasn't let out to bids as such, but the contractor was a consultant on the thing as it progressed. They had some input. I think that he would have said a curved building would cost more than a straight building.
- Riess: Probably why Aalto had to make such a major presentation is because America doesn't have curved buildings.
- DeMars: Yes.
- Riess: And it wasn't the beginning of curved buildings, was it? It was the beginning and the end, almost.
- DeMars: There's the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C.
- Riess: And the Guggenheim.
- DeMars: Usually the bottom line is a strong influence. And a curved building, particularly a round one, you have to get into it, it has problems in circulation and distribution.
- Riess: In designing Eastgate you had three different size apartments? I'm forgetting that you already knew who was going to be living in these apartments. You weren't just making any apartment house; you knew what the population was that you were designing for.
- DeMars: Yes. Now, in one of my mixed schemes that I pursued on other situations, like the one in Fort Drive Gardens, in the apartment house you put an emphasis on families without children, because really they cause a problem, which apartment house owners in the past have known. Those people can very comfortably live using elevators and so forth. Public housing in Britain, they found it too. The kid goes up to get his mitt, and he leaves the baseball bat in the elevator door to keep it open so he can run back out, and then he changes his mind, and decides to have a cup of chocolate. This kind of thing. Or playing in the halls.

So that concept, taken from the British, was to have a house on the ground with a garden with a family of that size. You could begin to have flats for a starting-off family. You already break it up. Whereas most of the public housing earlier on would have one housing type, and in that, you pump all the different types of things. Metropolitan Life was this way in New York. Whereas actually the version out in San Francisco had a large percentage of townhouses and maisonettes for a little larger family and children. That keeps them out of having to be placed in the elevator apartment houses.

Riess: Yes. Is there anything more to say about Carl Koch?

DeMars: One of the things he worked on while he was teaching was his Acorn House. It was a beautiful concept. Think of the typical trailer that can go on the highway, and on it, the roof folds over on top, a third folds up this way, another third folds this way, the walls fold in, flat against the side, and then the floor folds up against the side. The bathroom, kitchen, everything, the plumbing and the heater, all that is on this trailer in the middle.

You can put it on the highway and move it out with prefabricated underpinnings and things, and set it up in a few hours almost. It would be not intended to take it down after the summer and move it someplace else. But that was a means of factory producing, and that's the way it would unfold. It made a very nice plan. They built one of them, at least.

Riess: Did he have that background in prefabricating from wartime housing also?

DeMars: I think so. Quite a bit of it went on.

Then, while we were in the office together there, his version of the apartment house that we did for Fort Drive had these concrete floors, but the partitions all would have been prefabricated. You could buy, like a condominium, your piece of floor, and then they would set up the plan the way you wanted it. It could vary considerably. I think typically it doesn't need to go that far. If you're already into the apartment house, you don't have to have infinite variability. We talked about this a good deal while he was doing that.

Anyway, that apartment is very popular and successful still. Did you see the award we got for it?

Riess: No. [interruption] This is a handsome award. It says, "Presented by the city of Boston in the year 1951 to William Hoskins Brown, Robert Woods Kennedy, Vernon DeMars, Ralph Rapson, Carl Koch, for

excellence in the design and construction of the building at 100 Memorial Drive, Cambridge." The Harleston Parker Medal. And who is this? Is this the goddess of architecture?

DeMars: I guess the goddess of architecture, if there is such. [laughs]

Riess: She seems to be holding the Parthenon, and in the background we have the Boston City Hall. And then the Mayflower. That's fine. That's beautiful.

[interruption]

Riess: In this series in Architectural Record, building type study number 146 is Eastgate Apartments. Skip-floor corridor plans. It says here it's a promising trend, but you say no.

DeMars: Well, as far as I know, they haven't made much of a point of it since.

[looking at magazine] [James R.] Killian was the president of MIT. Burnham Kelly was the director of the Bemis Foundation. That was a housing research organization at MIT. Rapson finally went to Minnesota as the dean there, and just a couple of years ago got a special gold medal from the state for what he'd done. Here's Carl Koch, and Robert Woods Kennedy.

Berkeley. Building the House at 240 The Uplands

Riess: Did you have a commitment to teach when you got back out here?

DeMars: No, I didn't have any.

Riess: Was that when you got on the planning staff in San Francisco?

DeMars: Yes, but as a consultant. I really wasn't on the staff.

When I first got out here--. We used to come out every Christmas and see our families, and I think it was the year before, in '48, that Betty said, "If we're ever going to get back to California and build a house, let's look around this time." I guess we must have looked around before, because at that time she said, "Let's buy a lot." My idea was we'd buy an old Maybeck. A lot of people have that idea. [laughs] Well, there weren't any old Maybecks available.

So we decided that we would get a real estate person. We wanted to live in Berkeley. I visualized myself, as I had done before, commuting to San Francisco. We would live in Berkeley. One of the choice aspects of this site was that you just walked over to the Claremont Hotel where the Key Route train ended between the tennis courts, and it went down Claremont Avenue. My office would be in the city. That's the way I visualized it. Of course, I wasn't here very long before they took the trains off. [laughs]

Riess: This site was being subdivided by Mason-McDuffie?

DeMars: Oh, long since.

Riess: Why don't you say what this site is?

DeMars: Yes. We went to Mason-McDuffie to show us some lots. We knew that they were a prominent firm here with new lots. We said we were looking for a lot with oak trees and a creek and a view of the bay, and no telephone poles, and not costing too much. They showed us some in north Berkeley, but we couldn't get those combinations quite.

This was sort of the last thing they showed us. And it doesn't have a view of the bay, but it does have the creek, and it has oak trees. We talked about it, and we thought well, I guess we'll give up that view of the city. The lot, which is 150 feet on The Uplands, goes back about 160 or so down to the other point. I've never ever been down there. It was \$3,750.

Riess: Wonderful. And it is on the old McDuffie estate property.

DeMars: Yes. This whole piece of this little valley that goes over to Roble Road, and has the house which McDuffie lived in at that time. In fact, we met McDuffie, and discussed it with him.

I had made a model in Washington. I really planned the house in Washington. We bought the lot, and I arranged for a survey to be made, and then I couldn't believe when we started building a model--I've got the model in the basement--because the layers of contour of the cardboard just started going up like this. I thought, "Something must be wrong."

Riess: You had no idea it was so steep.

DeMars: No, because that was the creek itself. Really, it goes through this gouge here, but then the rest of it began taking the shape. But at first I said, "Oh, something's wrong." [laughs] It's so overgrown, and it goes down this corner, and then switches through. That house roof that you can see down there is as high above the creek as we are.

When we came out in 1950 we lived with Betty's mother. I was not looking for work yet. I was going to finish designing the house and get it built. I'm an architect. So I went to banks to get a G.I. loan. "Sorry, they weren't making G.I. loans." Someone said that Hibernia Bank was. I went in to talk to them, and the usual interview:

"You're an architect. Who do you work for?"

"Well, I'm working for myself."

"What are you doing?"

"I've designed this house that I'm going to build, for which I'm trying to get a loan."

"Hmm. You've just come to the area, you're unemployed, and you come in here asking for a loan." [laughing] But finally they decided to do it. Four percent loan, which was kind of nice. I must have had the plans well along by the time I was looking for the loan.

Then who would I get to build it? I don't think I went out to bids because I don't think the loan was going to be big enough--or the amount they would give me--to actually build it all. I was going to sort of--they wanted a fixed sum, but we had to do a little monkey business that I would pay it as a cost plus thing, the fee, and as it went along. There were a lot of details that weren't even completed.

I asked Henry Hill who had been doing some of his houses, which were the kind of thing we were doing, and he said Al Hirshfield was the one. Al Hirshfield was a physicist--something fancy. I don't think he was a Ph.D. quite, but he had a masters. And as it happens with some young men now, they go into a thing like building houses. He had done a number of things for Henry. So we started building it. Maybe I borrowed some money from my father-in-law to make up the difference. (When we finally built this wing on the house, a one-bedroom wing just seven years ago, it cost three times what the entire house and lot originally cost.)

One other thing, when I got back here, before I got the loan, I guess Warren Perry knew I was back and invited me to come and teach here. I thought, well, that might be a good idea. I have a little practice now at it--I guess he knew about that. So in this discussion with the banker I was able to say, "Well, I'm not exactly unemployed. I've been invited to teach at the University this coming quarter."

"Oh! Well, now you've got a job. Why didn't you mention that in the first place?" So I got the loan. And then later on they made a loan to Fran Violich on his house, because this was so successful. They thought it was a successful loan. The message was going around that modern architecture was okay, and they told us that, "We're very enthusiastic about both of these loans."

Riess: Was their problem the design of the house? It wasn't just your financial condition?

DeMars: I don't even think that I showed them any plans particularly.

Riess: Why are you saying that they decided modern architecture is okay?

DeMars: Because I guess most of their loans weren't for such. It finally came down to the case where I probably did have to show them plans of it. But in this first discussion I didn't. And I guess the reason I didn't show them plans of it, I didn't have them finished yet.
[laughs]

Riess: So then you started teaching?

DeMars: And roughly at the same time--and I was not trying to get something else to interfere, because I wanted to concentrate on getting this thing built, I thought in six months we could do it, move in, get out of Betty's house, but Fran Violich was working for the planning staff in San Francisco, on the planning commission there--

Riess: The Redevelopment Agency seems to be the name of the group.

DeMars: Well, let's see.

Riess: "1951, consultant to Redevelopment Agency on planning for Diamond Heights and the Western Addition." That's what I see here on your vita.

DeMars: That's right. The Redevelopment Agency was in the same building with the planning staff. That's the little one-story stucco building there on Marshall Square in San Francisco, right across the street from the library. The library was intended to have another building exactly like it, which would have been the opera house, facing the city hall. Instead there are two buildings exactly alike across Van Ness. The opera house didn't get built here; it got built over there. So that site was available, and during the fair in '39 they made a visitor's center, a temporary building, which is still there. Then, during World War II, it was a soldiers recreation thing. But that's beside the point.

San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. Diamond Heights

Riess: You were working on planning for Diamond Heights.

DeMars: Yes. Well, Diamond Heights is that area south of Twin Peaks, and equally mountainous. It had been undeveloped, except there were a few scattered Victorian houses through it with goats and things. They couldn't build, it was so steep, although it was platted. In other words, it was just like other parts of San Francisco--the streets are shown going up over this hill. They did it that way, and then if you couldn't get over the hill, you'd stop. They stopped the streets where they couldn't get over any more, and there was quite a chunk of land there that was not capable of being developed because they couldn't get streets into it on this plan. So they needed a new plan that made it accessible. It was quite a large acreage, a thousand acres maybe.

I was taken on as a consultant to the Redevelopment Agency. I think they went clear to the Supreme Court on the matter of--. It's not a blighted area, so they weren't tearing down, so it didn't meet the qualifications for federal funds for slum clearance, there were just houses there that had no streets getting to them. (Although you could get to them by driving on a dirt road, but that wasn't the streets that were officially in the scheme.)

Riess: Was this work you were doing influenced by the thinking of Telesis?

DeMars: Well, sure, Telesis to the extent that half of the employees of both the planning staff and the technical people on the redevelopment staff too had been Telesis members. So that was a question of thinking like-mindedly. Fran worked with me on the thing. I was a consultant to them, and they had a draftsman in there doing some of this work. And then there was another architect in San Francisco, Albert Roller. He had done developments. The two of us together were consulting. Our beginning thing was to do the development concept, with streets and so on.

Before Farm Security I had never heard of site planning. We didn't call it that in the University. Almost the first thing we got into, when we began to lay out housing in Farm Security, was what could you do about different road systems that would be a little cheaper? And then we began studying the garden cities movement, which had gone into a lot of study about cul-de-sacs and other things, because you didn't have continuous utilities in all directions, just in case something got built on it. You laid a thing out which was going to have a specific housing type, so the street need only be so wide, and so on.

That's what we did on Fort Drive, and Diamond Heights was the first instance of any scale of the ideas of the thing we did in Fort Drive being put to the test. It seemed like the thing to do. I have drawings. I'll find these at some point. We were going to have the whole range of building types, from single-family detached houses to double houses to row houses, to flats, to elevator apartments. We had a large model, and I've got Kodachromes of the model.

X EASTER HILL, 1951

[Interview 9: March 9, 1989]##

DeMars: A short while after I had first gotten back from Washington, and I had been working on plans for my house, Jack Kent proposed me to Don Hardison, an architect in Richmond who had been a classmate of Jack's. He was rather, I would say, well-connected with the downtown businesses and so on, and he did a church, and he did a little funeral parlor, and stores. He had a moderate-sized office in a building that he had done, that had dentists and others in the same building. He belonged to the Elks, and I forget which church it was, but he was on their list. The proper profile for a rising young architect, very much connected with the community.

Riess: He actually lived in Richmond?

DeMars: No, he lived up in El Cerrito, up in the hills.

So anyway, through his connections he was appointed to do the first postwar public housing project. Because he'd never done any before, they thought he should have a chance to do it. [laughter] (I hope I'm not cartooning this badly.) Since Jack Kent was a classmate of his, and Jack identified very much with planning and so forth, he asked Jack to recommend someone to do the site plan for him. He apparently, from books and so forth, felt he knew what he had to do about the buildings themselves. So Jack suggested me as a consultant on the thing and we met, and started talking about it.

I soon convinced him that a housing development of that sort, you couldn't have somebody do a site plan, and then give it to someone else to do the houses, and then get a landscape architect to put the trees in and the bushes. And this wasn't just being theoretical about Telesis and the Farm Security, but it really is the way war housing was being done. I think a lot of experience had taken place during the war on these quick war housing communities done by architects all over, in which the architect,

with whatever consultants he had on the staff, had to work together, the plan and the buildings.

Riess: So first you had to educate Hardison?

DeMars: A bit. It didn't take a lot of argument.

So, instead of my being a consultant to him, we decided to form a joint venture, in which there would be an obvious division of tasks in some way, but it would be a joint venture. It would not be simply that I would be doing the site plan, but I would be an equal architect with Hardison.

For some reason or other, when it was reported in the architectural magazines, they seemed to make a point of this, and quoted "the joint venture," and so forth, as if that were something unusual. I didn't know that it was particularly, and I don't exactly know who suggested it. It means that for a particular project you are associates, and you establish what your rules are going to be of the participation, who does what and which. We would share the profits somehow, depending partially on his costs and my costs, and the percentage of time spent by principals and some other little formula. All of this worked out beautifully.

Riess: Who worked this out? Was it someone else in the office?

DeMars: No, I don't think so. I think we just did it. It wasn't an elaborate thing, unlike Bannockburn, where we both had to have attorneys, the other architect and I, and spent the first six months seeing who did what and who would get paid for what, until we were going out of our minds, and little work done on the project. Don and I just had almost a gentlemen's agreement, and it may not have been much more elaborate than that. Don was always very fair all the way through.

But also, when we got started on the thing I had planned not to be full-time, because I was doing my house and I had a couple of things in the city. I proposed a couple of people for draftsmen. One had been a student of mine, and his name was Holmsey, part of Esherick, Holmsey, and Dodge now, and I thought he was very bright. We had a good rapport. So he was my contact draftsman, and I think at the beginning--maybe he was the only one. He would carry on through. I left Don to deal with the feds directly, because it wasn't my role or interest at the moment to see that all the i's are dotted and t's crossed and all of this.



Vernon DeMars with model houses for College Highlands development in Richmond, California, 1951.

Then, in picking sites--I think there were nine sites proposed--I also suggested that we should have a landscape architect right at the beginning. I proposed Lawrence Halprin.

Riess: How did you know him?

DeMars: He worked for Tommy Church, and I guess maybe I knew--I think he was too young for Telesis. I don't know quite. I must have known him by his work, and felt that he was a guy I'd like to have work with us on the thing.

We two were much involved in reviewing the sites. There was this site that had been a hill with a cross on the top which on Easter would be like the one in San Francisco where they had the sunrise ceremony. This was a site that had been I think purchased--maybe it was in the city's ownership--but it had been used by Kaiser during the war as a quarry. They took the whole hill down to make the fill for the shipyards. It's several blocks in size. So this filled the bay as necessary, but as they went down through the hillside, there were these huge boulders that were in it, and finally they hit bedrock, several layers of it, at about three different elevations.

Part of the property they didn't get still had some dirt on it, because it was a corner of the hill as it sloped up. It went up fifteen or twenty feet higher than the part they'd taken down. Luckily, these were rather flat, and there was a first level, there was a kind of an intermediate level that might have been eight feet higher, and then another level that might have been ten or fifteen feet higher than the rest of it.

Riess: It was sort of terraced?

DeMars: It was kind of terraced, but this was really bare rock. That's why they didn't go any deeper.

One of the plans which you usually don't have in a set of plans was the "boulder placement plan," which meant that we had to identify and draw in about 3,000 boulders, and the size would be starting from 3 feet by 4 feet up to a few of them the size of a Volkswagen.

Riess: That must have been so expensive.

DeMars: No, because they were lying around in groups, piled up to get them out of the way a little bit.

Riess: Moving them?

DeMars: Well, in talking with--. Now, Halprin was very much interested in this. The city was about to take them off our hands for nothing to make a breakwater. Halprin said, "No, we want them for the site."

They were used for two things: at the edge of the bluffs we were going to have to erect fences or little parapet walls--that would be expensive--and at the bottom we'd probably have to put retaining walls to fill with dirt or something. So a lot of the boulders were used to make a little wall just by stringing them along the terrace edges. At the bottom of the hill, by piling some more dirt behind them, you sort of created a retaining wall. So we used a lot of them that way.

Others were put in people's front lawns if the lawn wasn't too small. It ended up that people around there called it Easter Egg Village, because we painted the separate row houses in some cases in contrasting stucco colors, barn red, white, dark gray, yellow ocher, etc. Then the doors and window trim were picked out in what we felt were attractive colors complementary to the rest of it. But the planners, these planning students at Berkeley, called it Radburn on the Rocks. [laughter]

So, anyway. This was the site planning part. It proceeded quite well. Then, that dirt that I mentioned, the part that hadn't been carried away was used to create a layer on top of the solid rock so that sewers would not have to be dug down into the rock. There was enough of that to take care of the problem. The first level was almost at grade level and had soil on it. It was these two main terraces above that that were the bare rock, and that we had to do something about. So we didn't import any dirt that wasn't right there.

But the boulders, we didn't know how they were going to be moved around. We had an experiment one weekend with large bulldozers, and they just pushed them around without any trouble at all. Rolled them over and moved them quite far, some of them, and just kept going, and it was no problem at all. There weren't too many of them the size of Volkswagens. Four by six feet were the big ones.

Riess: Did you do soil studies to be sure it wouldn't shift.

DeMars: No, I don't imagine that anything of that sort was done at that time. They did dump soil around them, and none were put in the side of the hill ready to come down. Later on we found that one of the favorite playground things for kids was digging caves under them, and they did go back in and make concrete supports for some of the boulders, and then signs warning, "Don't let your kids--"

you know, dig under the boulders." That was something we hadn't quite figured on. So, then, that's the site.

After the Farm Security experience, and the wartime housing, I really felt that the row house did not have to be a bar of eight houses. And also in conception and theory that it wasn't eight people living in an apartment house jointly in a building; it really is a series of completely separate little domiciles sharing a party wall, that's all. Typically they're lined up, because streets are straight. And of course, a builder wouldn't jog them in and out along a straight street to give more identification to the thing. This is the way it is in Baltimore, for instance, where you have a long blank street.

In London and other places where they are lined up along the street, time, and the fact that no one builder in the eighteenth and nineteenth century probably could corral more than enough room for three or four houses at a time, means that when you get to the next group of houses, these become a little different. And then they paint them different colors, because of different owners. I didn't see why some of this, or what one saw in fishing villages and so on, couldn't be tried here.

At Easter Hill we had enough slight rises that these houses could step up the slope. We had enough situations where we could jog them a bit, sometimes forward and back, quite legitimately without lining up in the straight street and just arbitrarily doing that. So that was one thing. Then the other one, I didn't see why they couldn't be painted different colors.

I felt, too, that modern architecture had been sold. In other words, we now don't argue that we need to get rid of any residual bits of sentimentality, and the purism that one found in the early modern housing things in Holland and Germany, that was all, I felt, behind us, and didn't have to be pursued.

Riess: When you say modern architecture "had been sold" what do you mean?

DeMars: I just meant one didn't really have to argue too much about whether you were a modern architect, or prove it. So I felt if I seemed to have been going backwards in some of these touches--

Riess: It was not without knowledge of what you were doing.

DeMars: Yes, I wouldn't be panned for it. It didn't worry me that I could be, because I thought this was the right track, and I thought it would rescue the row house from the reputation it had got in public housing, as a barracks and as a hated way to have to live.

I didn't see why these couldn't be interesting little houses that people could identify with.

Riess: Was there any argument about that from Hardison, or in fact even Halprin?

DeMars: No. And, interestingly enough, he [Hardison] would go to the meetings with the feds in the city--.. Well, they were a little nervous. "A jog would cost so much," and a number of things.

He'd come back and I'd say, "Oh, Don, after all, I was the head of the housing standards, I know how standards are made." They're made by human beings trying to make a generalized application, and the question is, can it be absorbed into the totality of the project? If it costs a few bucks more, or some other things a few bucks less, how much are we allowed to spend on these things, and let's try to keep it within the budget. I was going to try to undo some of the things hated in public housing.

Well, apparently he dropped my name. Then I went over a couple of times, and I found that actually the staff that were beginning to get this thing through were quite interested in it, but they were going by the rule book, in a sense. One of the incidents, I wanted a front porch, where people could sit out with some dignity. It wouldn't be very big, but it would also be roofed to keep the rain off when you were trying to get in the front door. I even wanted to separate these porches, because there was a cliché kind of plan that had become the general plan for row housing, in which one party wall has all the plumbing backed up against it. The plumbing can be prefabricated to serve two sides, two kitchens, two bathrooms. The heaters and so forth would also have the stack go up that.

This plan meant I agreed that we group two houses, anyway. But the next pair could jog. So the jogs always take place from each pair of houses. But then I didn't see why, because the houses were paired, that the front doors had to be paired, which is what they usually did too. The reason they did that was because the stairs, if you had the plan flipped over in a mirror image, the stairs happened to work best on that wall that had all the plumbing in it, so wasn't the best place for the front door to be right at the bottom of the stairs?

Well, I thought, when you do that, immediately it says "Public housing." If you have a front porch, it has a dividing wall down the middle, at the front door and so forth, and that becomes an image that stamps it as public housing. Supposing we just move this porch over to the other side, and the door. Now,

that's supposed to be a less logical plan, but it turned out that after it was all done most people liked it better.

##

Riess: Were there things that you wanted that you were forced to compromise on by the feds?

DeMars: No. I don't think so. I don't think they made us do anything. We were aware, and I was aware, that this was a low-cost--for low-income people--but the budget was really very limited, as these all were. We weren't extravagant.

Riess: One of your reasons for wanting to give that kind of variety in a project like this, for 300 families, was that you also wanted to allow for a variety of families, and ages of families. Did that happen?

DeMars: Well, yes. This comes into the general standards for public housing anyway. In other words, it had been done for families. I don't know that public housing in general took care of childless couples. They were felt to have been able to fend for themselves somehow.

Riess: You had to have a child to get in?

DeMars: Yes. Well, that was before. I don't know if we had to argue in this particular case, but we wanted a certain number--and I think this was either worked out with them, or I think it's in the standards--for different-sized families. And of course, large families is one of the problems.

Also I think there was beginning to be a certain awareness about housing for senior citizens, so-called. I don't know that a young couple were eligible. I think maybe not, and I think that's proper, too. A young couple, presumably they're either working or they're living with their parents still. I don't know quite what their rules are now, because they've been more sensitive to the cross-section of the social population.

So we decided that the couples could be in a flat; in other words, a one-bedroom apartment. There is certain logic in having one stacked over the other one. Children aren't running in and out. Of course, they could run up one story. But for all the families with children, we wanted them to have a house with bedrooms upstairs and living room downstairs, and the back yard, and so on.

So we had this one-bedroom apartment that was stacked, had an outside stairway that went up with quite a large landing at the top, big enough to be a kind of a balcony. And then under that was also the entrance to the one below, which was also larger than just a stoop, and also had a rail around it. It was fenced in. So you had a private place.

Riess: It looks very much like one of the designs in that small group of models that you mentioned that were part of Wurster's war housing in Vallejo. Would you say it had been influenced by that?

DeMars: No, I don't think so. I think it was just kind of an obvious thing to do.

The two-bedroom house, which is almost the standard public housing plan, comes out with a flat front wall and rear wall because the bedroom takes about the same area as the lower floor. A three-bedroom house may have almost the same size living room-kitchen arrangement, but the third bedroom throws quite something else into the mix. I think we had two versions of that. When you get the third bedroom in, I think we matched that, because there isn't enough square footage to get the three bedrooms, even overhanging front and rear, which we did. It stuck out a couple of feet, and that provided part of the protection for the front door, and had a little bit more for the porch. So we lapped over a portion of the other house, so you really had three bedrooms across the back. Then you had a house with one bedroom upstairs, for a beginning family. The neighboring house got the remaining two bedrooms.

The party wall wasn't made of concrete or anything. We had a double wall for party walls, with some sound-proofing considerations given to it. I think we had batts between, and maybe double layers of sheetrock on the walls. I haven't heard complaints about it.

We already had a different look to one of the houses that hung over this way, so we did a different kind of a front porch for them, and we jogged those. Again, those always were pairs also, because it had the double room and that one. And then, a three-bedroom house, we got the three-bedroom by taking the two-bedroom house and using the ends of rows, and we added a little one-bedroom wing on the front, which had a porch, which gave a different entrance. This gave us one way to end the row, because the others would be flush walls. The other way was to end it with one of these flats. The rows we made different lengths according to how they fitted into the site plan, and all of these gave us quite a vocabulary, you might say, of three-dimensional things to play with.

One of the things, very interestingly--later on this comes into our competition for the student center--Halprin was very useful in the site planning and in the juggling of these spaces. We worked it out together, the streets, the actual layout of the street, and we had little models of the houses, little blocks and things. It was just a question of how many would fit in here, and then try it this way, and try it that way. We had done this in Farm Security too. The engineers would come by and see us with these little tiny things: "My kid plays with blocks, too." You'd have to live with that kind of remark.

We had a box full of these blocks and things. Next camp would come along, we'd get the box and dump them out and start in. We had the community building and these elements, unless we made a new one. And we had little pieces of cardboard cut in lengths for streets. The first thing we did was make a contour model, and then lay the streets out this way. It was all fluid; you could move it around.

Riess: And you're saying that Halprin did the same kind of thing with you in the student center? I just want to get that tangent pulled together.

DeMars: Oh, the tangent--later on, if we mention it--is that when we were doing the student center competition, and we put our team together, I proposed Halprin being in on the competition. And I had to argue with my architect colleagues. I said, "After all, here's a guy who's very sensitive to three-dimensional outdoor things, has had more experience in it than most architects, who aren't dealing with numbers of buildings and outdoor shapes and forms and so forth. I respect his judgment, and I say that he'll be very useful, not in the internal planning of the building particularly, but in the site planning relationships." And he was, in the other one.

We thought, well, let's try some of the different relationships being talked about or used in public housing. (I'm back to Easter Hill.) There are arguments about orientation, whether all the rows should face south, and then their garden would be on the north side. No, you'd face north. In Neubühl, in Zurich, you go in a front door on the north side, and then they put the garden on the south side. So then the next row of houses has their front door facing the garden, which is fine if it's a nicely-kept hedge. But if it's a wire fence, it might not be quite as nice.

In fact, we tried that out in Taft, one of the last Farm Security things we were doing, where we really juggled to see how

people lived with the arrangements. They all faced roughly south so that they wouldn't be facing west in that hot valley sun--I'm talking about Taft, California. We only had a couple of them, like the Neubühl thing, where the front doors on the north side faced the back of the other, and we were going to see how people lived with it. They weren't stuck forever with it, it was war housing. I don't know how it did come out.

Riess: So you didn't learn anything.

DeMars: I can't say that I learned anything. Then there's the way in which with a different orientation, maybe with houses that might be facing east and west, then you have an option; they're going to get sun in the garden at some time, even in the middle of the winter. You might have the front doors all facing a little court, and then all the back yards together, and then a passageway down the middle. And in fact, the sociologists think this is one way you socialize with your neighbor hanging the clothes out, and across the fence, which is kind of true. And maybe less so if that's the front door.

Riess: Were you aware of those studies by the sociologists?

DeMars: Well, yes. Aware of these considerations. I don't know that there were any--well, those were some of the minor conclusions. We were getting some of that in the National Housing Agency, because Mary Goldwater, who was our group, was one of those who, although an architect, had experience with some studies that had already been made in public housing.

Riess: At Easter Hill, would the feds have been interested in that?

DeMars: I think we probably explained that to them, that this is what we were doing there. So we tried, really, but it also fitted into a certain piece of the land.

Another one--the typical relationship of houses is facing on the street, in the typical subdivision. A lot of the earlier public housing, in order to cut down the length of streets, set the rows of houses perpendicular to the streets. Typically, you'd have to have eight units, because that was more economical even than six. That's standardized: if you live in public housing, you live in one of eight houses.

We had a stretch of land between the edge of the property and one of these first little cliffs, and it was too wide to put houses in a straight row down two sides of the street, and it wasn't wide enough to have them endwise, so all right, we'll have the ones where the rows are perpendicular to the street, and we'll

have alternate garden-side, front-side entrances, with a little court where you came into the front side, a little open space. And then the other side, we'd line them along the street in the typical way, with a little tiny front garden, and see how it works out.

Well, how it worked out was that people who faced on the street liked it better than the people who faced on the little entry court, because the entry court was filled with kids playing and making a lot of noise, and they had less privacy it turned out.

Riess: When did you learn this?

DeMars: Well, I learned that thing from Clare Cooper's report later on. [laughs] Because she literally interviewed them. We even set up one long, long row--it worked out in the plan--just to see how many houses in a row would be intolerable. It was at a point where it didn't really look that bad, but rather than just having a small gap where you could get through, we made it one long row with maybe a little break in it.

Riess: How did people select the kind of house they ended up in? Was there someone who showed them, in the sense of a real estate agent?

DeMars: I think they had their pick according to as they came in--depending, of course, what their family mix was.

Riess: So did the color of the house interest them?

DeMars: I don't think they had any choice.

Riess: Well, you said they had their pick.

DeMars: Oh well, yes. The pick, while they lasted. There were so many two-bedrooms, so many three-bedrooms, so many in different parts of the site.

I left one of the types out: there was the four-bedroom house. I think a couple of them may have been where we put a little wing on the end of the three-bedroom, and that was a four. We may have done that in a couple of cases. I think in general we used it again for variety. We had the option. It could be quite legitimate to have that be a separate house on one floor. We thought they shouldn't have to be climbing up to the second floor, because it implies a lot of kids. Certainly, they need more room than anybody.

There weren't that many of them in the whole project, and we didn't want to have them be too identified as the "rich people that had the estate." So we had that be a duplex, and the bedroom end was plugged against the bedroom end of the other, so that the porches and the far end where all the activity would go on was into the open space on the rather larger lot needed--we put most of those on street corners, and with setbacks that gave a larger lot.

So, this one-story sort of "ranchhouse" added another three-dimensional element to the space. We really got quite a bit of visual variety, and you could tell what part of the site you were in.

Riess: What did you do that was enlightened about cars and parking and traffic?

DeMars: We simply had parking bays.

Riess: There was no way you could get cars out of sight?

DeMars: When I say a parking bay, sometimes it's a court, a parking court, but you were near enough in most cases to see your own car. In some cases the parking was right at the street, particularly where the ends of the rows came out to the street. The parking came in as an indentation that would take care of maybe eight cars parked side by side, rather than end to end at the curb.

Another note on the porches was that, on the house, so that it didn't seem like they were just the identical house, but had the porch at one side, we decided that since the front part of the house had a single bedroom in it, you could either have two windows or you could just group the two windows and have a long window. Both of them worked out reasonably well for the furnishings, as far as that's concerned. It made it look a little bit different, basically, rather than just the house is identical but the only difference is the color.

Also, on the two-bedroom houses where the plumbing stack and gas vent went up through the middle of the house, we grouped them together and made a little phony chimney around it. It adds a note which is rather important in the look of the whole thing. You can see where the flues are on the other house; we couldn't group them in that case, so we didn't do it.

And about the windows, I would say most public housing by this time was using either metal windows, or they were using casement windows, and builder housing would have been using steel sash or aluminum sash. I thought I would try to get something

else that recalled what people were more used to, the double-hung window. It also had more trim, and then you could paint the trim different colors. You could even have the sash a different color. Our hope was that later on the people might be given the paint, when they had to repaint, and they could choose their own colors. Of course, this never happened. Bureaucracy wasn't going to allow that.

But what it was, we had these double-hung windows, with a typical broad trim. These are stock, and they're the cheapest kind of window you can use. We worked all of this out for the first run at it, to show them what the idea was, so we could have the trim one color, the sash another color, the house wall itself another color. We worked out combinations, and we had a little quarter-inch scale set of cards in the shape of the wall, the roof, the windows, front door, etc., and tried them out. We'd lay out a whole row, pick out the colors that looked interesting, record it, and that's the way it all came out.

Now, the other thing was, typical houses in that neighborhood had picket fences around their front gardens. So we thought, their front yard is really assigned to that house, let them build a fence. So we did a few as samples, and we had four kinds of pickets. We actually did these on several houses, just to show how the mix-up might work, and some wouldn't have them, and some would. I don't know that the housing authority allowed any of them to do it later.

One other thing, I wanted to go back to some of the things that Hardison had to argue about. The finish on the front porches, they started off by saying, "Well, it doesn't rain much out here, I don't think you really need much of a porch." Or, "The houses that have the overhang of the second story wouldn't need a porch."

"No, but we want the porch to be a place," I argued.

"Well, you could have a little porch on the two-bedroom houses, with the flat fronts, because they need some protection for the front door, but you don't need railings."

"But we want railings for a sense of privacy."

"Well, you don't need a railing unless it's over eighteen inches high." (That's according to the code, their standards.)

I said, "I want the railings even if it's only six inches high. This is so you can have the bicycle left there, and so on."

The railing consisted in some cases of one two-by-four at the top, and a one-by-six halfway down. But it was something to sit on.

Well, they finally concluded it really wasn't costing them. So I had four designs of railings. One had vertical little slats in it, another one had wooden redwood boards in it, that made it a little different color. But it was a thing to leave the baby buggy on, or to sit out there. You'd have a chair, the bicycle could be left there and so forth. It gave a sense of dignity, I felt, against the kind of thing you find in Baltimore where the front entrance consisted of three steps. In the hot weather, the family tries to sit on these three steps.

So that was accepted. Poor Don would have to go back and say, "Well, DeMars says he wants such-and-such."

Riess: That sounds like it could get very awkward after a while. You couldn't do some of this on the phone yourself?

DeMars: Well, I just did it, you see, at first. Then they'd have the argument. Then I'd tell Don, "Let them use their judgment. I think it's very important in this whole thing." And somehow or other, we got by with that.

Riess: Were there other projects going on in Richmond with other architects simultaneously?

DeMars: No, not public housing.

Riess: Were these feds also dealing with other public housing projects in the Bay Area?

DeMars: Probably in San Francisco. In fact, Wurster--Valencia Gardens may have been done earlier.

Riess: So they were hearing from other architects who had other notions.

DeMars: I think so, yes. This office was probably a kind of regional office for some area around here, so they probably had a number of projects in. I think they began to recognize ours as more interesting than most. So they were sensitive to it. They could see we weren't being outrageously exorbitant in the things that were being done.

Riess: Did you remain involved, pass by there every few weeks to make sure that people were taking good care of it?

DeMars: Oh, the finale of this was unfortunate. I would say the first few years it really looked great. There were some Japanese families

in there that had lovely gardens in the back, and many people did things in their garden. But then for some reason the authority decided another project further up town, which was really war housing, was the classier project. So Easter Hill was a place, maybe because problem families were there, but this is where they would put the problem families. So there was vandalism on the thing itself. I went there years afterwards and they had knocked front porch posts out, and it was just sort of let go. Rocks spray-painted, and so forth.

Riess: Has it had a renaissance?

DeMars: I really have been unable to follow it. But what happened, Hardison went back in and did a very expensive remodeling at some point, fixing it up. I still think that it's--. I haven't been through there recently. I used to take students out there in the first year or two. I was doing a course on housing, and we would make a visit. There was one of the side hills that were left, because there were houses on it, and you could overlook it and discuss it and so forth. And then it began to look like I didn't want them to see it.

Riess: And how about visiting architects from all over the world? Did you find yourself taking them there?

DeMars: Or they would inquire maybe of Hardison, and be sent over. Yes, I did for a while.

Now, of course, the other side of the coin is that as the houses began to get beat up, the trees got bigger. [laughs] So the trees got quite splendid. It was quite a nice landscaping thing, with street trees and other groups in quite a variety. And the rocks, and where there was planting around and so forth-- those who had some sense of the environment did respond to it.

One of the things I think that came out of Clare Cooper's book is that it is people who are in trouble who are living in public housing: they've got kids, no husband, some of these situations. Just trying to make it economically--they do pay rent, you see, so they had to pay something--they have so many other troubles that the aesthetics of the situation, or some of these other little things which become a kind of plus for identification and so forth, are kind of lost on them. She found that many of them felt that this was a very temporary thing for them, and that they deserved something much better than living in public housing.

She would ask, "Do you notice the different things about your house, or the next one?" They almost didn't.

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DeMars: In Clare Cooper's book she found that some of the black families were more sensitive to the fact their house was a different color, and the front porch had a different railing. They liked that, and they liked the fact that they had the private yard, and so on. They really did rather identify with the unit.

I wouldn't say that since so many families didn't know the difference that those are reasons not to do it. Burton Cairns--I think I mentioned he once said that if some of the migrants don't come up and shake your hand and say how much they appreciate it, don't let it make you think it wasn't worth doing, or that you shouldn't be doing that.

Riess: What was the Pilot Project? The Pilot Project, and then the Plaza Project grew out of that. The Plaza Project was dated 1957, and I'm assuming from the little bit I've read it was handed over to a builder at that point.

DeMars: That came about through Jack Tolan. He was an attorney for the Barrett Construction Company, and he was a friend--as well as a distant cousin--and he knew about my work in housing. The opportunity opened up for replacing the war housing that was all over Richmond, for block after block after block. Something like thirty thousand units, or some such number as that.

Easter Hill, of course, was an island in the thing; there was no housing to be torn down there, but it was all surrounded by that. I think there had been a competition, and I guess what happened was that Don Hardison and I were hired by Barrett to make a proposal for them in competition with other developers. Barrett would have been bidding against other developers, who would have been showing what they did.

Riess: Was this to be public housing?

DeMars: No, these would be houses for sale.

In discussing with them what the proposal might be, I had the suggestion--well, I have to backtrack again. Richmond was divided into I think twenty-foot lots. They were a little sliver. It ends up with a kind of a thing like you'd have later on in one of these trailer parks, and that's the kind of house that came.

There are a number of examples of those. When I was working on my row house for the Ladies' Home Journal I was also aware of the San Francisco row house, which is on a twenty-five foot lot.

That was the traditional lot. It goes back, actually, to the Spanish--so many varas, I think, or something. In that width of twenty-five feet you can get two bedrooms, but it isn't comfortable to get two bedrooms and a bath between them. It's hard to get side-by-side things with exposures on both sides of the house. So, if you can go to thirty feet, you have a much freer situation for planners.

Riess: Were you able to?

DeMars: I proposed that when we do this we do it on a thirty-foot lot. They would then go from twenty to thirty. And in San Francisco you'd try to go from twenty-five to thirty if you were doing it. Because the typical San Francisco house is really a one-story house sitting on top of a garage--Corbusier would have done that up on pilotis. It actually really is very good in its sense, too. It has lots of variety. But it doesn't make the cheapest kind of house you can do, and we felt that if you could go these few more feet in a place like Richmond, it would be much better than the twenty-foot house, as well as better than the twenty-five for them, because you could get it all neatly in the two stories.

Riess: So you did your design for Barrett?

DeMars: Yes, and again I was following the philosophy in a sense from Easter Hill, but going a few steps farther on that thirty-foot lot. (At Easter Hill we didn't have thirty feet to work with per house--eighteen feet was what we had for the little two-bedroom house.) Let's see how far we can go in getting three different house types. Or how many different house types can we get that take a whole different approach to the whole plan? One of them I wanted to use would be the house from Ladies' Home Journal. That was to be an inside row house.

We persuaded Barrett to buy, as a starter--. Going back in experience, so often you're going to repeat houses, and then you don't start building them until it's all ready to go, and you build them, and whatever the mistakes on the first couple of houses, it's already down the line. So we said, "Let's build one each of these house types. We'll get the end of a block in Richmond," which is what we persuaded them to do.

We picked out an area which had some nice surroundings, trees and so forth, so that you saw it in its best light, not standing out here in the barren middle of nowhere. There was just room enough to get five house-types, three row house-types, a duplex and a single-family, which we would throw in at certain points in the final scheme. The duplex went on an end lot, and so did the single-family, and the three rows between. Since there were only

three sharing party walls we put the Journal house in the middle because it was a true row house with party walls on each side. Of course it could be set at the end of a row with either a blank wall or you could add windows without changing the plan. The other two would only work on the ends of rows, because they had quite different plans.

They actually built these three, and had a grand opening and so forth. It looked quite nice at the end of the street. I must go by sometimes and see if those are there. And we probably made some little minor adjustments from the reaction we got out of the public to these.

The next step was to take a four-block area almost over by the railroad tracks, right next to the high school, much farther east. There again this was divided by these streets, and to keep it from being bisected by this and to illustrate the pattern of how one might keep through traffic from using them, we took one of the through streets and cut it off, made a cul-de-sac out of it, and then realigned a piece of it into a little loop at one corner, and made a small court for the third piece to serve all the various houses.

Riess: Is this the place you showed me pictures of last week, where you maintained some of the pre-existing houses?

DeMars: Yes, and two or three existing ones, again to sort of show how it went. In that particular case, I think the illustration may not have been the greatest.

But they were built and sold quite well.

Riess: Did you make a lot of money on that job? Up to this point I'm assuming because you've been involved with public housing that somehow it's almost the most minimal, and I don't know. But now you're involved in developing schemes.

DeMars: Yes. Well, of course, in the public housing they had fixed fees. You didn't get a percentage of the house cost. I forget now--it was probably a percentage of the development cost.

Riess: But the fixed-fee, was that an incentive for you and Hardison to cut corners?

DeMars: Well, no. When I say fixed fee, I mean a fixed fee based on the percentage of cost, probably, which you're sometimes accused of pumping up so you get a higher fee, but someone else is controlling this cost presumably. If it gets out of order, and

particularly in public housing, they blow the whistle on you. So that would be the case there.

Now, this other one, since we were working in a sense for the builder-- Well, the little demonstration project, that was a pilot. I forget how our fees were done on that. But we knew we were going to get into this larger thing when it was applied elsewhere. And we may have gotten a fee per house on the later one. I think it wasn't a killing, but it was a reasonable architectural remuneration.

I think after the pilot, the four-block area, was built, I think I just drifted into other things. Don Hardison--there may have been a gap there, when picking up the further blocks, and it just seemed, "Let Don do it." We'd established the thing, and I don't even think I was getting any kind of a royalty on the rest of them. They made further adaptations of the houses working with Barrett and built, I'd say, hundreds of them.

Someplace along in there I worked for Barrett for something called College Highlands, which was a typical single-family residential development. It may have even been before the pilot project.

Riess: Where was College Highlands?

DeMars: This was in Richmond, almost over when you're driving to Sacramento on the freeway. It was a couple of hundred houses.

I had worked out a house-type which had a number of possible variations on the same house plan. It was after that, and Easter Hill, I think, that the suggestion of doing the replacement for the war housing with Don Hardison came up. I think that's the way.

Whether it was remunerative--[laughs]. Well, you weren't supposed to make a killing on any of this kind of thing anyway.



XI MUTUAL SECURITY AGENCY GERMAN COAL MINERS' HOUSING PROGRAM,
1952

Riess: In 1952, you had the assignment to go to Germany for the State Department. How did you get that?

DeMars: This came about purely on whatever reputation I had before. Chief of Housing Standards wasn't that far back, and other publications and so forth.

What it was was a program which the Marshall Plan was doing in Germany. The one that I was working on was in the Ruhr. It had been preceded by the beginning of the program the year before, in which competitions were held for a number of cities in Germany to build--well, moderate cost housing for moderate income people. This was to get their economy going again, and get people housed again. The city was expected to give a piece of land, and the Marshall Plan provided a sum of money to build the houses. They were fixed sums.

Riess: Were you going in to consult?

DeMars: No. They were trying to see whether some American know-how of builder houses, mass production, whatever had been going on either during the war or with American builders, whether using some of these methods would spur the re-housing of Germany, and they could learn something by it.

The Marshall Plan was dedicated to this purpose. This was spelled out in quite some detail; what they asked for was that there would be competitions among German architects, and they spelled out things that they might address, from prefabrication to mass production of kitchen units, or whatever. If there were codes that didn't permit this, then if they felt it would be reasonable that the codes should be changed, and if the changes would be approved by the German National Institute of Architects--the Bund Deutscher Architekten--then the city would have to agree to consider that if they wanted to get the funds for the housing.

The competitions were held, a number of architects were selected, and I think they did about a dozen cities, from Munich up and down throughout Germany. Usually, it would be something like several hundred units in a plot of land. These were under construction, and I think it was only a year later that there was a particular problem in the Ruhr to try to get miners to come back and work there. In the first place, the housing wasn't available, and they were trying to spur coal mining and to get steel production going again as a major project against pressure from the east, which was quite evident in the whole scheme of things.

So the same thing was applied here, but instead of having another competition, they decided to simply pick the runners-up from the number of competitors they had in the first competition. These were firms, again, from almost all over Germany that were being considered for this.

Riess: What was the agency that was in charge of all of this?

DeMars: It was called the Mutual Security Agency.

Riess: Which was a Marshall Plan agency?

DeMars: Yes, the whole thing. I guess this would have been called "The Housing Program," something like that.

I got a phone call from William Wittausch who described this somewhat. He had already gone to Germany, he'd come back, and they wanted an architectural consultant. The year before they had a consultant on this other program, and this is Professor Bogner from Harvard. You might put that down, because his name will come up again. I don't know why they wanted variety or the change, but somehow my name must have come up someplace. The head of the whole program in Bonn was a former army captain in World War II who had then gone on to be the military governor of Upper Swabia. He knew German reasonably.

Wittausch spoke German quite fluently. He was with the FHA here, and he was in real estate and had been for some time. "Captain Butler was coming to Washington the following week, and could I, if I were available and interested, could I come back and be interviewed?"

Riess: The prospect was that you'd be there for a long time?

DeMars: I would be there for this program which he outlined, and it could be maybe a year.

Riess: I'm surprised that you were up for doing that.

DeMars: You mean that I was interested in doing it? Well, I--[laughs]. This was '52. I'd only been back here since '50, and although I had these consulting things with the city on Diamond Heights and so forth, that was really not a very all-consuming kind of thing.

Riess: Teaching was not taking that much time either.

DeMars: Yes. Well, teaching--my role was to be a practicing architect and teaching, and I had really not established my office yet or my connections in a more permanent way professionally, or opened an office of my own.

Riess: You were teaching one class?

DeMars: No, the full load was typically one design class, which meant two four-hour sessions a week, and then other courses--drawing, pen and ink, watercolor, and maybe some other one-unit course that you would give that would be of a lecture sort. But the main one was the design course, and usually it meant meeting sometimes a couple of other times, and sometimes students would come to your office.

Riess: You were in a position to give this up for a year?

DeMars: Well, I gave it up by getting Joe Esherick to take my place. He had an office in San Francisco, a small office. I didn't know him all that well, but I knew his work, and admired it, and Bill Wurster did too. Bill Wurster knew him. This now was when Wurster was dean, and I went and talked to him about it. I had just started--. The semester was underway. I would say it was February, and I had gotten two or three weeks into the problem. Wurster wasn't always sympathetic with people having those obligations come in and--

Riess: Opportunities, not obligations.

DeMars: No, I mean not having the obligation to the University be thought of as a second obligation. But he felt that it had international connotations, and all this kind of thing, and that I should be doing this for the country, and if I was the guy, he shouldn't stand in the way. (I don't know if he said that at all when I discussed it.)

I said I would make a proposal to him about who could carry on the case, so Joe Esherick came over and we had a long talk, and he was interested. He had never taught before, I don't believe. So, to make a little joke here, I was going to say that the camel got his nose in the tent. [laughter] But he liked it, and was

liked, and went on. He may have been in and out; that is to say, I don't know that he taught from then on continuously.

Riess: Tell me a few stories of Germany.

DeMars: All right. One thing, if you recall, that little report that you saw is done on a peculiar kind of oatmeal paper, it looks like.¹ Although there was stationery, which I suppose was from the U.S., from the Mutual Security, the MSA, very often things which were done in our own little office, like a report of that sort, some of it was being typed on the backs of old maps and things. I say old maps, I mean wartime stuff. Apparently there was a great shortage of paper. I don't know who all got copies of that, but it was quite an interesting idea.

Wittausch had done the first report, and the second one presumably was assigned to me to do. I can't imagine myself being that organized, but apparently when I had to, I had to. [laughs]

Riess: Well, Germans are organized. Maybe you just took on the local coloration.

##

DeMars: Well, it's interesting. Captain Butler, our boss--he was a nice guy--he said that the Germans are orderly, but that doesn't mean that they're efficient. [laughs] I remember him telling us all kinds of things that they did that were not efficient, and saying, "And this is what we're going to screen out of this project we're doing." I could see there was room; if you were trying to enter the twentieth century, and cut some costs at the same time, there were a number of things that were evident that could be done.

For one, the typical row house that was being put up by communities had a full basement, full cellar, to keep the coal and the potatoes in, and had to have a drain in it. So that was way down below the ground. The way clothes-washing was done, you'd boil the clothes, and you had a great implement which you bought in the hardware store, and you took the clothes out with a stick and you lowered them in this, and it squeezed the water out which ran onto the floor and down that drain. That's the way it had to be done.

Then, you walk upstairs with the wash, carry it up above the second story into the space under the roof. The roof has tiles,

¹Second Progress Report. German Coal Miners' Housing Program, US Mutual Security Agency Housing Office, Essen-Heisingen, Germany, October 17, 1952.

and they have little spaces between them; they're quite steep so that when the water pours down over it it doesn't get through, but you can almost see through them, enough light gets in. And so you have the clothes hanging in there because air gets in. That's where the clothes are dried, all that space. Well, on cubage basis, if you were analyzing it, that basement and this other drying area was a piece of space that didn't have to be that way.

Then, another thing that we were told by the people that were speaking for the miners was that the pride of the miner's wife is her nickel-plated stove she gets as a wedding present.

Riess: Oh, you did mention that in your report, and it turned out that they would be perfectly happy to dispense with these things.

DeMars: Yes, and it wasn't her delight to polish it every day and so forth. [laughs]

And for the laundry, "What would you think of having an electric washer that did this? "It would be marvelous!"

I think in the report I mentioned also the thing called Die Bergmann's Kuh. We were told that they had to have the shed for the Bergmann's Kuh. The Bergmann's Kuh is the miner's cow. It was a colloquialism for a goat, which you milked and got the milk. Well, did they want this shed? Yes, they wanted the shed still, and the miners said they wanted it, but they weren't going to have a goat in it, it was to keep the motorcycle in. And so on.

Riess: Why did it take a team of Americans to go over there and gather this information?

DeMars: Well, because, in a sense, the way it took me on Easter Hill to get the feds to let us put porches on public housing, if the architects were told to start in with, "You're going to do this public housing, and here are the standards," then you follow the standards and you get the money and you go off and do it. Someone has to break the ice, and since there were reasons to break the ice here--. I don't think any individual architect--

Riess: None of the individual German architects could have tackled the question?

DeMars: Well, it's just that they probably would have had such a--there was pressure to get on with rebuilding and this sort of thing.

Most of the houses were done by the traegers, a semi-public organization that built the housing, and probably hired the architects, and were told what they wanted out of them. They

didn't for the most part take it on as a challenge or try to confront it. It needed someone to upset the apple-cart. There were all sorts of pressures for new thinking that were coming from--and we had some of them on our staff--these national figures. Dr. Wedepol, I think he was one.

Riess: What do you mean "pressures?"

DeMars: He was trying to promote the idea of completely pre-manufactured systems of plumbing, of kitchen and bathroom systems and so forth, all kinds of combinations; rather than putting it all together out of pieces and parts, the notion of a complete system with the heating plant, a plumbing wall and all this. We didn't go quite that far into it, but he came to many of the meetings that we had.

Riess: Whom did you actually meet with? Were you meeting with the architects who were going to do the drawings?

DeMars: Yes, we'd meet with the architects. We met with the miners' organizations.

We were trying to introduce the idea of competitive bidding of general contractors. Let me back up for a moment here. The typical project, the architect working with a client would do the drawings and plans--they were at the stage which we might call design development here, the schematic conceptual thing has been agreed on--and then you carry some drawings out which are actually at scale, and contain in general the details of the plans and what it's going to look like. But the minor details, many of them are yet to be done. (This is the way it used to be in this country, too.)

Then, the bids are taken on quantities. (This is the quantity survey system which the British use, too.) The architect specifies so many board feet of lumber, so many cubic feet of concrete, stone, this and that, and the bidding is done on those pieces, sometimes separately, in fact, most of it separately. Then you'd get the best bid from this, and the architect's responsibility is to collect them together, and this is the final cost of them. He completes his drawings somewhat on this basis, and whether he can afford to.

And then, as we were told, almost every project ends up in a lawsuit, because then these separate bidders say, "Yes, but we had to use more than so many square feet! You say so many cubic feet, but it came out to be more than that. And this was changed, and that, and so forth." Because there isn't an overall fixed price. Usually, every project costs more than it was supposed to cost. Very often, there are lawsuits trying to straighten it out.

Riess: I thought that the traegers were the contractors. You're saying that they were not?

DeMars: No, they wouldn't be the actual contractor. They would be the developer, when the developer may not be a builder. In these Marshall Plan projects they were bidding against general contractors, and had the general contractors gotten lower bids, we would have accepted those.

Riess: Okay. Now, you said that you operated from a headquarters that was a house.

DeMars: Yes, and it turned out it was very convenient. A house to live in with large enough rooms to be able to have large meetings, and to be able to have displays of whatever they were working on, and a large enough kitchen. So we had a kitchen staff, a man and his wife, and one secretary. We had a second one at times that could be brought in. That was sort of the set-up of the thing, and to find a house such as this we had to get out into the suburbs.

Riess: You mean for you and Betty to live in eventually? And for the [William] Wittausches?

DeMars: Well, Betty wasn't in the consideration quite yet. It was just Wittausch and I and the others, about six people.

We had to find a large house, so we found it in Essen-Heisingen, which is a little suburb, about as far from the city of Essen as from Oakland to here--I walked it a couple of times--with quite some countryside in between. It was also not more than about half a mile from the Villa Hügel, which was the ancestral home of the Krupps. It was a great barn of an Italian building on an estate that wasn't all that huge, but it was in a beautiful site. I would say it took about four acres.

When we first arrived there, before we got this house, and I don't know where we'd been sleeping at the time--. This was in the British section of the divided sector. The American sector was I think around Bonn. So this was full of Britishers. They'd taken the Villa Hügel over for their main offices. We were given a couple of bedrooms and a bathroom, with very elaborate gold-plated fixtures. We found it very inconvenient, and not at all workable. I don't think we were there more than a few days.

As a matter of fact, because of some delays that I told you about, I really didn't get there for almost a week afterwards.² They'd had the offices there [Villa Hügel] at first, and then when I got there they were already in this house in Essen-Heisingen--the Villa Hügel is in Essen-Heisingen also. Wittausch had made some acquaintances among the British, and we were invited over to a couple of things. One was to play "Housie-housie." "Housie-housie" is bingo. They had a whole series of little things like this, and they don't come to mind right now, but when they'd call them out, we'd sort of bite our lip at some of them, because they were so folksy and so forth.

Riess: It sounds like there were a lot of different authorities. Did you find yourselves appreciated, or was it kind of baffling?

DeMars: Well, both. I think we were appreciated, and I think they felt we were--I don't recall any stonewall business we were getting, or resentment. No. I think they appreciated the fact that here was this money coming to build something very much needed, and we hadn't brought our own architects. I was just kind of a consultant to share what I could. The reason I kept thinking of the date of Easter Hill is that I had some slides, they were Kodachromes, and I'm sure that this is one of the things that I was trying to preach to them.

In the first week or so I was there I was given a tour of many of the other housing projects. The typical house, even some of the postwar things done already were stucco over cement block, cream stucco, all the same color, a long row of things like our early public housing. At the most it might have a little projecting lid over the front door, and it had all these other characteristics I was talking about in our institutional-looking housing. It was lifted up above the ground because you had some windows into that basement area, so they didn't have to dig down too far, and it was a masonry, concrete block house.

The question is, "Did we have any suggestions?" (The Germans weren't asking that, this was coming from Butler.) "Couldn't we do this?" and, "Why do they do that?" and all this kind of thing.

I said, "Well, it seems to me that they are awfully monotonous and rather dull--hoping this is no offence to anyone--and there are things one could do to make them more interesting." I said, "I've seen in your own villages where different houses are painted different colors, and they're not all in a straight row, sometimes there's a break in them, and so on." (My whole

²See earlier story of Soviet-American Friendship Committee.

vocabulary of things from Easter Hill.) I had pictures from Denmark, and even a few from England, showing houses which were essentially the same, but by painting and so forth-- . The architects took this quite well, most of them.

Riess: And so they made changes?

DeMars: Well, they did. There was finally a book done on the thing which mentions this.

Riess: Was your assignment explained to you thoroughly ahead of time?

DeMars: Kind of, but only in general. Wittausch--anything I didn't know then, he would explain.

There was a huge dining room in "our" house, and in one corner was a table with a built-in bench along one side and the end. I guess that was the family thing, with chairs along the other sides. It would seat a dozen people at each meal. Very often the gatherings went on late, so we had to give dinners to the architects as well, and then the discussions went into the night.

When I got over there it was about a week into the thing, and the architects had been brought together to have a general kind of conference. It was the first meeting of all of them. I was to give a little talk with some slides and so forth. They had a translator. I think Wittausch did part of his talk in German, but part in English too, because Butler was there. When it came my turn, obviously I was doing mine in English.

They had this woman, who we met several times later, who had been picked to be the one to translate for us. But apparently a young man who had gone to school in Berkeley--he was from the Ruhr area--he went up and told her that he knew me personally, and that he could talk about the things I was talking about, he would be able to translate it better. So he started the translation. I soon learned--you do a few sentences, and then you wait for them to translate it.

We weren't more than three or four minutes into it when one of the Germans protested. He knew English quite well, and he found that our friend was elaborating. He wasn't translating what I was saying. He was partially translating what I was saying, but also giving a few opinions of his own. They wanted to hear exactly what I was saying. I don't know what else he had been saying thrown in. So there was a little bit of a hubbub, and he retired, and this lady took over. She was really quite good. I could do a whole statement, and she would translate, and then I'd

do another one. So, that was the first of those kind of incidents to take place.

Soon I was learning a little German: "Guten Tag," and "Bitte" and "Danke" and so on. And then even a phrase or two from my G.I. handbook, which had handy phrases like "Entschuldigen Sie mich, bitte." And then, "Wollen Sie mit mir ein Spatziergang machen durch dem Staat?"

Riess: Aha, yes, getting friendly with the natives.

DeMars: Then, about the second week right after this, they were having a groundbreaking for a project from the year before. Butler was not available, and Wittausch was not available, and they had to have a representative. I was sent off to Recklinghausen, one of these cities in the Ruhr, to officiate at the groundbreaking. It was on very short notice.

There was a chauffeur that typically drove us around. I said to him, "What will I do?" I don't think they told me very much what I would do. There would be what's called a spatenstich, which is the groundbreaking. Spaten is a shovel, or spade. The event is a "spade-sticking."

Well, anyway, in the car he said, "Well, tell them 'Entschuldigen Sie mich, bitte, aber ich kann nicht guten deutsch sprechen, und so meine Freunde hier mein Übersetze ist--'" or something. One of the architects I think was to meet us there. Maybe it was a project he was doing. He would be taking over, so he would do the translation. And so I learned that on the way, wrote it down, and was ready to say it. And then I was told, "Now, when you stick the shovel in, you say 'Glück auf,'" and that is the miners' expression. It's the same thing as aviators would say, "Happy landings," may you come back. "Glück auf," when you go into the mines. "Lucky out." With luck you'll come out. That's about all we can wish you.

So I did that, and it was a hit. I stuck this shovel in and said, "Glück auf," and there was great applause. [laughs] Then it was immediately followed by a band in full costume looking a little bit like the gang in The Music Man, with red plumes on their fancy hats and so forth. They immediately burst into the Grand March from "Aida." It seemed appropriate. So that was one little experience.

[interruption]

DeMars: After we got the planning launched I did some traveling.

I had not been in Munich since my earlier trip in '38, so two of the architects wanted to show me some of the countryside. These were the ones that I had struck up the greatest rapport with. This same young man who translated for me at my first spatenstich, he was from Munich, and it was kind of interesting. On that trip and at other times they taught me some Munich phrases and words which I was to use when I got back to Essen to see if they could understand them. They said Rhinelanders wouldn't be able to, and they were right.

Riess: Was there a modern movement in architecture in Germany in the 1950s?

DeMars: Oh, yes, I'd say that there was. All the new construction you saw you would mostly call it in a modern idiom, not necessarily Corbusian international style, but they had their own simplified idiom. It was a new identifiable thing, and I think it was rather interesting, some of it. These would be in separate buildings. But the housing was rather dull, this particular kind.

In fact, some of the more interesting housing was left over from the Garden City Movement when the Krupps built small estates in the outskirts of Essen and so forth, which were really quite lovely. Brick, and quite nice little cottages. You asked about other authorities we were dealing with. One was the Ruhrsiedlungsverbund. I mentioned that we dealt with the miners union representative occasionally. Well, the Ruhrsiedlungsverbund approved all land use, a kind of a large zoning on land use, and one of the concepts of this was the thing called Grünfläche, green arrows. It's a variation of green belt. Instead of the notion of the town being surrounded by green farming countryside, which in a sense German towns already are, they also felt that you had to have fingers, or arrows, of green pieces pushing into the town, so that it was more immediately available to people who worked in mines all the time.

The town of Essen itself, in parts of it you were not aware of the smokestacks and the mineheads. And where they were, they were very often surrounded by trees. See, the Krupps and the managers, they lived there too, and they had to have a decent place to live. The more chemical things, with big smokestacks and so forth, were out away and hardly anybody lived there; it was out in other parts, and I think everybody simply commuted to them.



XII COMPETITIONS, THE 1950S

[Interview 10: March 30, 1989]###

Cologne. Ein Ideenwettbewerb. 1955

Riess: We're talking today about entering the Cologne competition. When did you first get together with Don Reay?

DeMars: I'll even go back a little farther. I guess I must have been chairman of the architecture department at Cal by that time, and we were in the process of building up the faculty. I forget how I first became acquainted with Don Reay, or knew of him. I guess my interest in housing and the new towns and so forth in England were what led me somehow to get his name. He was the chief architect for several of the new towns in Britain, and the chief planning designer. Then, for several years, he'd been the chief architect and planner for Stevenage, a new town. That's one of the twenty new towns on the outskirts of London. In 1952, when I visited Stevenage on that trip I wrote Catherine about, I must have met Don, and he seems to remember it.

I don't know whether his job there was coming to an end or whatever, but we decided to bring him over as a visiting professor. When he came and we got better acquainted, I found that he was more knowledgeable and interested in the aspects of urban planning and housing and so forth than any of my other colleagues, and had real experience in it. Much of my interest in what the Britons had been doing in getting a mixed usage in the community planning, different housing types, all the things that I've tried to carry out in the Fort Drive proposal there in Washington, came from the English experience. Here was someone who had had it, and I felt that this would be a good thing to introduce in the school.

I don't think at that time I knew what a very capable draftsman he was. When I use the word "draftsman," I mean with a real flair, almost a cartoonist's kind of skill, and I liked that

about it too. But I didn't know this until he got here. And, when we got acquainted in the first few months, he came up one day with, "How would you like to do this competition with me for Cologne? It's called an ideenwettbewerb," an idea competition. "It's not to build it, but it's to come up with planning concepts and architectural concepts for the area that was bombed around the Cologne Cathedral." Well, I thought it sounded like a very interesting thing to do.

So we sent for the materials, and then we had to find an office someplace where we could work on it. We had two or three months in which to do it. We found a space, which was actually under an elevator, down on Center Street and Shattuck, which would be walking distance back and forth from the University. What had happened, this was an entrance hall into this building with an elevator, and they found out if the entrance hall was made into a jewelry shop, and the elevator was hoisted out of sight, up to the top floor, then there was a lot of room that they could add to another room on the second floor where the shaft was. It was one of these things--we weren't waiting for the elevator to fall, but it was a comfortable room big enough for what we needed to have, with a window out onto the street.

We started working, and then finally we got the materials from Germany. Both of us had worked on large-scale site planning things. The most direct way to go is to make some kind of models where you can push the models around. So we decided we needed a model of the cathedral to start in with, and scaled drawings of it were included in the package of the drawings and photos that they sent.

While Don was making the base and doing some other things, I said, "Well, I'll get my wife to help me, and we'll do the cathedral."

Riess: What do you mean, it was included in the package?

DeMars: When you sent for the--you pay a fee to get the program, you see. It may have been \$25, or something like that. They sent photos, and also drawings too. There were the drawings of the cathedral: the front elevation, the side elevation, plan, and so on, so that you could see it in the context, because that was an important feature in the whole thing. And the air views were very useful.

We got a student to help make the model. His name was Michael Painter, now a very capable and prominent landscape architect. He was making the little cardboard buildings that we were juggling around. These were purely for our own study purposes. We had to make the bridge across the Rhine, and all of

this. Well, we did that a little later, because then we took photos of these and so on.

But that experience was quite interesting, and I also saw what a marvelous draftsman Don Reay was. He did these sketches, perspectives and things. I think you've seen a whole bunch of them.

When the time had come to get it off into the mail-- No, I'm thinking of another occasion when we were working toward a deadline. This was the Sydney Opera House competition. [decides to continue story] You think you've got plenty of time ahead. Then you're working frantically at the last to get it done. And then, how could it be? We've only got one day left! And then finally you've only got two hours left, and it's got to get in the mail, and so on.

On this occasion we pretended from the beginning that it had to be due an hour earlier than it said to get it in the mail. We told ourselves the deadline was 4:00. We'd been working to that deadline for so long that we'd forgotten all about the fact that the real deadline was 5:00. Anyway, we got it done and got to the post office at about a quarter to four, because our office was just across the street from the post office. We got there and stood in line for a while getting more and more nervous.

Finally we get to the counter, and the lady measured the thing, all rolled up to go to Sydney, Australia. She said, "I'm sorry, but the length and the circumference of the package added together can't exceed X inches." And this was about four inches over, maybe only three. And what do we do? Oh my God, what do we do? We sank as we saw the time, the deadline coming up.

And then somehow or other, either Don or I remembered, "But look, it isn't 4:00; 5:00 is the deadline!" So we raced back to the office, unpacked the whole thing, cut two inches off the tops and bottoms of everything [laughing], and rewrapped it. So we got it in. It took about a half hour to rewrap it and go through the whole thing.

Riess: Why is it that it takes every single minute to get the entry together? Is that because you procrastinate, or because you keep embellishing and refining?

DeMars: Well, that was part of what one had to sort of learn. This is what students go through, too. They think that working a little longer, you might get this or that to be solved better. Later on, in practice as well as competitions, we planned very carefully what we were going to do, how many days for this, and tried to

keep to a schedule. In practice, deadlines are just as real as in competitions, even more so at times. It's something I've tried to teach, particularly after some of this experience. Students can learn while they're in school how to manage their time so that they can somehow come out with a project completed.

In the Ecole des Beaux Arts you didn't come in with a bunch of scraps of tracing paper because you "didn't quite have it finished." They had fallen into accepting this in recent years at Berkeley. Actually, there would be students arriving where and while the jury is meeting, not the day the work was due, and some of them not even hearing the first part of the discussions. They needed to have a little more discipline to learn about that, but it took some learning on our part to do it, too, and some planning.

Riess: What was the outcome of the Cologne competition?

DeMars: The outcome was simply--. One of the strange things, or not strange, we discovered this in the case of Sydney also, is that we kept wondering, well, what happened? I think we even wrote and got no response. Finally, someone came that knew that we'd done this. (We had taken the models out in the courtyard of the old architecture building and set up some background strips of paper, quite a theatrical set-up to be able to photograph it, so a lot of students saw it.) Someone saw this German magazine that came out with the winners. It had already been a month or so--this was two months down the line.

The people running a competition get so enthusiastic about the winners; the winners are the ones the lions didn't eat, and the rest of them [laughs], you can forget about them. The same thing happened in Sydney. We couldn't find out about Sydney until someone came in with an Australian magazine that showed and told about the competition, which was already a month old. It had the drawings of the winner in it.

Riess: Well, how do you recoup your losses, then?

DeMars: You don't. This is why competitions are usually done by young firms with draftsmen who are contributing their time, or just a group gets together and does it. But when you have draftsmen on the payroll, and you start using them for this sort of thing, it gets to be rather costly. You wouldn't bring people in from the outside to do that, because if they were good enough to be involved in that sort of thing, you'd already have hired them.

Riess: Were you ever able to use your solutions for Cologne? Was it a valuable expenditure of energy?

DeMars: Yes, the learning of tackling the problem. In other words, in thinking we'd responded to that particular situation as though it were real, and which we intended it to be, we learned something from that.

Riess: It was a plaza-type problem, wasn't it?

DeMars: Well, a plaza--there was a processional implied. I don't know whether it actually called for a plaza in so many terms, but we had one in it because we thought it was an appropriate response to the solution.

I was showing this to Peter Selz the other day, and he said, "Well, that's very much the way it is. They've done it like that." I've been in Cologne since our competition, just very briefly, the bus was going through and we got out and went into the cathedral, and somehow or other what I saw around me didn't feel like this. I didn't say, "Wow," or something. In our model looking at it, it seemed to Peter to look like what he'd experienced there.

It was an interesting, complex problem, because it had to do with rerouting some surface traffic around, surface streetcars and so forth. The train station there, that wasn't changed, but access to it was important, with pedestrian crossings around the cathedral over this street, and so on, and a central bus station for the city, and parking, and two museums, and other buildings. So it was a very interesting problem.

The Sydney Opera House

Riess: You brought up the Sydney competition. Could you tell us a little bit about what you came up with for Sydney?

DeMars: I've really talked about Cologne because it was the first of the competitions that we had done. A couple of more important ones are coming along: the residence halls in Berkeley, and the Student Center itself.

I think it was right after we had completed the Student Center that the Sydney Opera House thing had come up. Although we were in working drawings for the Student Center itself, we had to keep busy, and Sydney--. In a sense, I consider it--well, less satisfactory, even though it didn't win either. I was embarrassed by it after I saw what won the competition for Sydney.

Riess: Why?

DeMars: Well, it seemed to me ours--we should have seen it was kind of dumb-looking. I don't have that feeling about the Student Center, but we'll talk about that separately. With the Student Center competition, one of the buildings, of course, is a major theater and concert hall, so with the Sydney Opera House being completely that, we thought we knew all that needed to be known. In other words, a lot of the thinking that had gone into the Student Center Building we thought we could apply here, which is what we did.

I think that our scheme would have been a more practical building than what they came out with at first, because they weren't able to get the opera house fly galleries in Sydney, because they wouldn't go up through those shells, you see. But it was obvious that the Australians wanted a great symbol, and it is an unusual sight.

Riess: You're saying your design just wasn't a big enough concept?

DeMars: Well, we gave it the literal translation functionally, and clothed it in something to keep the rain out--the functional approach, you might say, roughly the international style, with a few little modifications--but that didn't generate a beautiful and imposing structure. It would never be confused with the Paris Opera House, or many another great opera house in Europe.

The message came home when we heard the story of what happened at the judgment. Eero Saarinen was one of the judges, and he came there a day late. They had already made a preliminary screening. However, he wanted to see everything that had gone through. And one of the rejects was this thing done on sort of butcher paper by Bjorn Utson from Denmark, and he pulled this out. "Well, why did they reject this?" "Well, it was--whatever it was that the rest of the jury argued." So he proceeded to talk them into its reconsideration, and finally to convince them that this was the way to go. They had to hire a renderer from the outside to make a new drawing of it for publication purposes, because they didn't think his was sufficiently persuasive.

We saw the actual plan, which was included in this magazine, and it was so beautiful, the plan itself, in the sense of its aesthetic appeal to architects that read things into plans, things we call poché and spaces and all of this. It's like when physicists or mathematicians talk about a beautiful equation, you wonder well, what's beautiful about that that a layman can't understand? I think a layman might see a certain patterning, but I think an architect sees even more, and without complete analysis

he can almost read it immediately, that this looks good. It's moving, and it looks like it could be made to work.

I think in one of the responses that Saarinen made about how the competition had been judged he said, "Well, we felt that this was an unusual site, such a marvelous location. It was not a place to see a bunch of packing boxes on a raft." I thought, "Eero, you've hurt my feelings!" That exactly described ours. [laughter]

UC Berkeley, Residence Halls, 1955

Riess: Is it a terrible blow to lose? How many competitions could you lose before you felt that?

DeMars: Well, you learn something each time, too.

Riess: Very philosophical.

DeMars: That one again didn't cost us a great deal. It cost us our own time. Between Don and me I know that we did all the work on the Cologne thing, making the model. We paid Mike Painter minimum wage, probably. He was still in school at the time. I don't know quite how we found him. Very nice. I'm very proud that he--

Riess: You launched him.

DeMars: That he got launched into the big world, and has been doing so successfully.

Riess: I guess I was just thinking of you as somehow wounded parties. You don't enter a competition unless you think you're going to win, right? You go into something feeling you're going to win-- or do you?

DeMars: We knew in an international competition there were going to be an awful lot of entries. No, I think you go as kind of a gamble.

Riess: Is it important for your resume that you enter these things?

DeMars: Yes, I think so. Did you see the sketch [exhibition at University Art Museum, February 1989] of Saarinen's Chicago Tribune Tower, skyscraper thing?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Well, that got the second prize. They didn't build the building. But the architectural profession saw that as the vision of the expression of a skyscraper, not like the Gothic tower which was the winning prize, by Raymond Hood. That was doing almost an interpretation using all the rules of Gothic architecture that you could.

Riess: So it does advance the profession.

DeMars: Yes, because the profession all see it, and sometimes it's picked up.

Riess: You entered the competition in 1957 for the residence halls at Berkeley.

DeMars: Yes. I had somewhat of a reputation as being involved in housing and so forth, and when the program for residence halls on the campus came up--it was going to be an invited competition--I suppose they may have asked Wurster to make suggestions.

Riess: The regents asked him?

DeMars: Yes. It's typical to go to the dean of the School of Architecture and say, "Who would you recommend that we invite to do this?" Bill undoubtedly proposed Esherick and myself. We were on the faculty at that time.

Riess: Proposed you as a twosome?

DeMars: Probably. I even forget now who some of the others were that were invited, and they may have gotten these suggestions from several places, and maybe asked Wurster to go over it with him. That may have been the way he put it together. But Esherick had a very small office, probably not considered able to carry a thing out, and so did I. They put us together with Ernest Kump.

Riess: Who put you together?

DeMars: Well, this was the way the invitation went out. We were asked--it was discussed with us--because I don't think we would have on our own felt that we were unable--. If we had done it, just say Esherick and I, we could have pulled together an office, we would have gotten the rest of the people as necessary.

Riess: Let me get a little more of this straight. Were you the only team? Did Wurster also put together a few other teams from his faculty?

DeMars: No, I don't think so.

Riess: Okay. And the building committee of the regents decided that you needed to be backed up by Kump?

DeMars: I suppose.

Riess: It seems odd.

DeMars: Well, the same thing happened when the Student Center competition came along too, because I was put together with Hardison.

Riess: It's such a denial of the individual.

DeMars: But again, there's the ideas, which they think they're getting from you. And then there's the capability: can you put it together as a building and get the contracts? Have you ever done anything this big before? You see, that's the kind of thing.

In a sense I had had this experience at MIT when we did that apartment house, which was as complicated, more so, than the residence halls. That would have been one of the plus values. But at the moment I didn't have an office of any scale. I didn't have any. It was Don Reay and me. I suppose they thought that Kump, who had an ongoing firm with draftsmen and so forth, would be able to immediately get it underway.

Riess: Was there anything else about Kump's practice at that point?

DeMars: Well, yes. He had done the Foothill College group of buildings down on the peninsula. He also had quite a reputation as one of the young Turks, and he was a bit younger. I think he probably had more of a building reputation than either Esherick or I had at the time. Esherick had mostly done some single-family houses for rather well-to-do clients, and Kump had gotten into some housing.

##

Riess: How did you set yourselves up?

DeMars: We worked somewhat separately and then together. Kump was down on the peninsula, and we were on this side, so we met in Esherick's office. He had a modest office with about four or five draftsmen. Maybe he was doing houses and things.

I think I mentioned earlier that when I took this German assignment in the Ruhr I got Esherick to come and take my class, and he came and stayed. The guest that stayed. [laughs] He did very well. I hadn't any experience working with him, I just admired his work, and he mine, sufficiently to be willing to go

into this. But I saw a little bit of evidence while we were working on it of some slight diffidence on arguing certain points. He simply would come in with his version and be rather quiet about how--but he didn't sort of approve the other versions. [laughs]

Well, we didn't win that one. I think one of the reasons was we were trying to save a lot of the trees--there were some big redwoods coming up the middle--so our scheme was not, what shall I say? a prototypical diagrammatic thing. [John Carl] Warnecke cleared the site totally, and so conceptually the buildings were on the perimeter, and a cluster of the dining facilities in the middle. I would say as a site plan it was understandable what it was doing, and it sort of made a declaration of, "This is what one of these groups of buildings should be like."

Ours I think was too much adapted to this particular site. I think in straining to save some of the landscape we may have given too much emphasis--. I'm sure any redwoods planted there now are as high as these were at the other time. They also then used that as a kind of rubber-stamp for two more blocks of these things. I'm not sure whether that's liked or disliked by the students, the fact that you recognize this entire block solution as, "The student dormitories." Saves money, because then you use the same plans over again.

Riess: The competition was just to do one block, or did you know that it was going to be three?

DeMars: I'm trying to think. I think it was just one at that time. It went immediately into the second block. And then the one on the other side was done a little later.

Riess: If this had been more clearly communicated, would you have done it differently?

DeMars: I suppose that we might have thought that each case ought to be taken up separately anyway, for variety, and maybe you'd learn something on the first ones. In fact, I'm not sure how they're viewed now, whether they're viewed as a satisfactory solution to the problem or not.

Riess: You are thinking of students having some kind of critical, aesthetic point view, or what?

DeMars: Both ways. Do they like them? What's the alternative to these particular versions of student housing, of that density and so forth? It [Warnecke's design] makes sense. The same arguments we almost used in the Golden Gateway when we got to it. It pushes them to the outside of the site, separates them as far apart as

possible, and you make use of the streets as open space beyond, so you've got these separated. That kind of a building needs to not be a slab building going up with a number of stories all looking out; and you don't want to be able to look right into another one that's too close nearby and see everything that's going on. You can get a pair of field glasses if you want to do that.
[laughter]

I must ask some people in the administration how they view them at this stage, because for instance-- Well, earlier dormitories had been Bowles Hall for men, and the hall that Wurster did for the women.

Riess: Stern.

DeMars: Stern Hall. And I think both of those are rather liked. And even International House, you might say. This other, Warnecke's, admittedly is more Gropius-type modern architecture. But I'm not sure, I think maybe now with Post-Modernism and so forth, that it would be avoided. They wouldn't do that again.

Riess: Did you have any notion how to present something to an entity such as the regents? Were you clued in ahead of time as to what would appeal, how to handle this group?

DeMars: Well, the regents are not the jury.

Riess: Who was the jury?

DeMars: I don't recall right now. But it would have been a professional jury, possibly with a couple of regents on there. If they felt like putting in their comments, they would be permitted to. On our jury for the Student Center were two regents. However, I'll tell you this story when we get to it shortly. But no, I think that you go at what is the right thing to do in the case. You're being hired not to try to second-guess the clients, in this case whom we would assume were-- Well, we weren't even doing it for the client, we were doing it for a professional jury that was going to evaluate from their knowledge of architecture and so forth what was the best solution. It was their job to sell it to the regents, or the client.

Riess: Was Warnecke on campus?

DeMars: No.

Riess: Do you remember any of the other competitors?

DeMars: I don't at this moment, no.

I think if ours was done, it would have been interesting and accepted, and I think I have the drawings of it in the basement.

Riess: Did you use color in yours?

DeMars: I don't know whether we did or not. I don't recall how restrictive the presentation might have been. There's always a problem--. Some of the other firms, if they're a big architectural firm, they'd be hiring professionals to do it, and what you're doing better not look at all amateurish.

But we were paid to do this competition, you see. I think we received \$3,000, which paid for about half of it. That would be the cost of paying the people who did the drafting, with the principals probably getting--I think if we had won it, then we would decide how we would split it up.

Riess: What were you making money at?

DeMars: Well, I was a professor at the University of California.

Riess: Was that enough to live on?

DeMars: Yes. A lot of them did, had to. But also in our cases, of course, we were there not as Ph.D. theoreticians about architecture, but we were there as professors of design because we'd had experience designing things and getting them built. The Beaux Arts teaching tradition had been pretty much that way.

Currently, the people who teach the history courses are architectural historians who got Ph.D.s in the subject and have written books on the subject. They're very capable and knowledgeable. The history courses when I was in school in Berkeley were taught by John Galen Howard and Warren Perry, and they had been raised on the classics, and gave their opinions of them. They had done a little bit of reading to present a course, but that was considered all you needed to know.

Riess: If you had had a hundred more hours to work on your residence hall project, might you have won?

DeMars: I don't think so, no. I think we came to our conclusions rather reasonably early. In fact this had, I would say, some input into our competition for the Student Center, because it wasn't so much more [hours], but the consideration of alternatives, which we did very thoroughly.

Having lost the competition for the residence halls, I think our conclusion was that we had done it sort of like, "Here's the analysis of the plan, it would be logical to do this and this and this, and so forth, and it comes out like this." Since you don't have a client saying, "I don't like this!" or, "What's this here for?" or, "Why don't you move it here?" except among the three of us to discuss it, I'm afraid that we accepted the almost inevitability of this scheme, based on the logic of all the decisions we were making along the way, responding to the areas, the plan, the outlook, sun and light and open space and how we thought it would be used.

Riess: Is it ever the case that you would ask someone to look over your shoulder, like Saarinen or like Wurster? Could you hire someone for two hours to come and consult?

DeMars: Yes. Well, I'll tell you about that when we get into the Student Center.

Riess: You didn't run this one past Wurster. After all, he recommended you.

DeMars: Yes. I suppose we were so damn self-confident or something, and we thought with three classy stars like us, we don't need any other opinion.

Riess: The other thing I wanted to ask, did you make that housing a design problem for your students?

DeMars: No, I don't think so.

College of Environmental Design Brainstorming Begins, 1957##

Riess: In 1957 you were co-chairman of a committee with Jack Kent to establish the College of Environmental Design, and to draft the legislation for Academic Senate approval.

DeMars: Yes. That was one of my tasks academically. When Wurster first came out it was called the School of Architecture, and he was appointed dean in 1950. Then it became a college of architecture.

Bill had in the back of his mind trying to do a thing similar to MIT, at least when he was there and when I was there. He had gotten to be the dean of architecture and planning [at MIT]. Landscape architecture hadn't gotten into it, but that was an obvious thing. His goal was to include that to get to finish out

the whole combination. I'm not even sure that he had thought of things like design, the furniture department or whatever, as being legitimately part of it. He may have. But I'm sure that we talked him into it, that here was an ongoing thing which had some logic to be included. It got "outcloded" a little bit later--.

Riess: When you say "we talked him into it," you mean you and Jack Kent?

DeMars: Well, it might have been Jack and some others that were involved. Fran Violich I think was representing landscape architecture at the time.

Riess: Would you say that the notion of including design had grown out of Telesis?

DeMars: Maybe, but it seemed so logical if you're going to talk about designing environment. Part of the environment is the whole level of things which in many other countries--. In Denmark, for instance, the furniture design is done by architects, because it's one of the things they have to do to make a living. There aren't enough buildings to go around, and it's just sort of assumed. I think that that's why they've been rather good at it, because they have a bit more background, and they're probably committed to the modern world, and not reproducing Louis Quatorze and so on. Which may have its place.

But Jack had just had quite a handsome raise of salary, at the [San Francisco] city planning department, and I think it was a bolt out of the blue when he announced that he was resigning the position to start a Department of City Planning at the University of California [1948]. So that had to take a little time. That must have gone on for a year or so. Jack and Catherine were meeting, and these meetings are described by Sally Woodbridge. I think she pretty well covers these connections.¹

Jack had been there for some time, must have been talking to Bill even before talking to me. I can't quite remember when we first talked about the whole putting together of the thing, but part of the question in Jack's mind was whether he should be associated with architecture. Maybe it should have been political science. There was this concern that they would be kind of overpowered by the size of the architecture department compared with theirs, and so forth. Subsumed. So he was holding out a little bit.

¹ "CED in Wurster Hall, A History," CED News, Fall 1984.

In fact, and I think is quoted by Sally, in discussing this with Sproul, Sproul wondered why they wanted to rock the boat to do this thing at all. Wasn't it satisfactory the way it was? Except here was a department, city planning, which was floating, and they wanted to connect it with something so that they didn't have to deal with deans, and then this separately.

At a certain point Jack was saying that unless they could have this understanding that they would have their own identity, and a good deal to do with both the planning of the building, as well as the actual construction of the department, that they weren't going to be subsumed by--.

Riess: Was this a realistic fear, that the Department of City and Regional planning would be subsumed.

DeMars: Oh, yes, and in fact, they tried to do it. There was great opposition to leaving the word "architecture" out of the name of the college. I think that's also described in Sally's thing.

I remember meeting with Jack, and mostly addressing how you would set it up so that you could be an entity, and it would be together. I'm sure that I thought that there should be maybe some joint initial courses, which there are more of now than there were in the beginning. The city planners were really resistant, because there were graduate students already, some in architecture. They could come in from anything, home economics, and in the first year fill out--I think it was a two-year course.

Riess: So what were they resisting?

DeMars: Being involved with architectural design. And in fact, over some years it really drifted so far away from design, I think many of the city planners feel that it's got off into purely analysis and programming, and land use demography and all this kind of stuff--all of which is part of it certainly.

Riess: Did you have an advisory committee from AIA or Institute of Planners, or some sort of broader group of people who helped you think about this prospect?

DeMars: My fellow architects, the professionals in the department who were teachers, we talked about it, and we discussed it at faculty meetings, and I suppose I felt that that was sufficiently the pulse of the academic situation. We represented--we were in private practice, and there were enough of them who were so--.

Riess: You're describing the pitfalls in putting together a model college of environmental design. Could you have looked to another group of people who had gone through this?

DeMars: There weren't any, really.

Riess: MIT was just planning and architecture?

DeMars: Planning and architecture, and didn't have the other.

Riess: Did they have pitfalls at MIT?

DeMars: Well, [pause] I wasn't aware of them. The other thing is too that the department is not so large at MIT, the architecture department. I think there were only six or eight on the faculty, something like that. And I think the city planners were maybe four or five. They all knew the architects and met once a week for lunch on Wednesdays, bag lunch or something, the whole bunch, which the college here seldom does. Bill rode such a--I won't say a heavy hand, it was an acceptable hand, but he really was a very leader-type person. If you disagreed, you thought twice about doing it too loudly.

Riess: But it looks like he's made you his lieutenant in many cases.

DeMars: Well, he did. I would say that. And I suppose he had in mind when it came about that I'd be the first chairman of architecture, which did happen.

Riess: So that meant that you had to have a heavy hand then, also.

DeMars: Well, but on the architects' end of it you'll notice one of the phrases that Sally Woodbridge mentions. When the whole package concept was submitted to the Department of Architecture she quotes a phrasing which troubled me at first because it almost sounds like the opposite. She says, "Architecture was the only department which noted 'no disadvantage of collaboration serious enough to warrant its inclusion in this report.'"

##

DeMars: It almost sounds like they saw no purpose in joining up on it. I had to read it two or three times to straighten it out.

I would meet with Jack, and we'd go over the wording as he was going to present it and describe this thing. Jack, on occasion, when he gets into these legalistic things, is so afraid that every contingency hasn't been covered that sentences get immeasurably long. I make no pretense at being a journalist, but

I sense when there's a sentence that gets too involved, and I can't quite understand it, even when I write them. I try to simplify it, and if I see the same word repeated too many times, or too many qualifiers in it, or whatever--in fact, I think this is relevant.

I had a student--this is on this subject, reasonably--who was doing a thesis, a very bright guy. He was writing these kinds of sentences, and I said, "You know--" and he said, "Oh, yes, I do that. It's what I call the fog index. If you have more than three three-syllable words in a sentence the fog index begins to rise. You get four of them, or five, and the fog has totally closed it off." I thought it was a good analogy, because if a sentence gets too many thoughts all pumped into it, you can't handle it after a while, because you need a period there. In any event, Jack would get into these things. I don't know whether he's straightened this out now, maybe he has.

Jack and I would meet, and I wasn't having too much problem of input from our side, because, well, we didn't see any problems! [laughs] But I think an image that both of us had--I still have this, sort of--I know of no director of planning of a major city in the world who was not initially an architect. The European training would have been from that point of view anyway. So they have a design orientation. They may have had to give up their involvement in this to be a director of planning of a city like Stockholm or whatever, but still, they have a sense that these decisions they're making as planners, land use and so forth, are going to have implications on the actual physical structure of the city.

I think it's quite possible that there are some city planning graduates from Berkeley who really either may never be or should never be a director of planning, to make decisions where they would be really ignorant of the implication of what this has to do with the three-dimensional form of the city, and how it works. They get so specialized in their particular field. There have been attempts several times to get this straightened out, and I think there is once more right now an attempt to give some background to those who come in as graduate students from some other disciplines than architecture.

I think that they should experience some of the beginning design courses, and maybe even a slightly advanced one, so they could see how you have to think as an architect, first to solve a problem just functionally, and then what the alternatives are, and which are the better ones, and so forth. And that this kind of decision is going to lead to this kind of thing.

They'll be dealing with architects. They'll know at least how architects think about it, and they can argue back with them. In a sense it's like the way most of us who are involved in any kind of major projects, our engineering courses gave us the ability to know how engineers arrive at their conclusions. We know how it's done. Most of us wouldn't risk doing it ourselves, because you've got other things to do with your time, you'd lumber through it. My partner John Wells has a degree in engineering as well. He was quite capable of--but even then, you'd get rusty in time.

Riess: By the same token, then, the architects take a planning course or two so that they know how to talk to the planners?

DeMars: Well, I think they are encouraged to take some of the planning courses.

Riess: It sounds like a very slippery area, and I can certainly see why the planners would feel a little defensive, can't you?

DeMars: Yes. The ones who haven't had the architectural background, they have an inferiority complex about their design capabilities and graphic skills, if any. Either that, or they consider architects all a bunch of long-haired visionaries that can be ignored. Then the architects themselves can get awfully superior about it, particularly at the student stage. "We do all these things, and what do the city planners do?" So there's this all the way through, and it is one of the things we hoped that the college would [correct]. It would be even worse if they weren't in the same building.

And really a lot of the engineering students also ought to have some architectural background, particularly those who are going into structural design. I hear this now from my partner John Wells, who is actually an employee of an engineering firm. He was saying that their notion of what an architect does and can do and should do is very primitive, like picking color schemes and wallpaper!

Background of the Student Center Competition, 1956

Riess: Now, on to the Student Center!

DeMars: Yes. I think we need to back up just a little on that. I think I mentioned before, occasionally when there are some real projects on the cutting edge of where the profession is at the time, and I

hear that there is something really being thought about happening, that I try to get some information on and do it. Now, I did this at MIT where I knew, of course, by that time, Clarence Stein and his wife, Aline MacMahon. We would see them in New York. I think I've been over that relationship before.

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: I said that I was thinking of giving my students a theater to design. She said some of her friends in Hollywood had an idea of a theater that would have a school combined, and I said that if they gave me a program, I'd give it to the students as a problem.

I gave it to a group of pretty advanced students at MIT, the same class of students that we gave the problem of the Eastgate Apartments, the tower, and set up in somewhat the same way. Here was their program. Where there were alternative possibilities of approaching this program, or anything you could put into it as an input, let's not all come out with more or less the same plan and see who did it best, but rather, after we've discussed what are all of the optional possibilities, particularly in the theater form itself, let's then see who would like to pursue this route, and who might pursue this route, and do them. We made it a kind of research project.

This experience gave me a bit of a background on what theater people were considering as problems at the time, as well as some slight prototypes of exploration. And I'd been interested in theater, as we know from earlier things that I had done. Then I was looking for projects to do for a group of graduate students here in 1955 or so, along in there, and I heard that a new center for the students was being thought of.

It would have come up after the residence halls, even the notion about it, because that was part of a study called Students in Berkeley. Residence halls, dining facilities, and a new student union should make a group of buildings, and a long hoped-for theater should be included. This began to coalesce into a program, and I heard about this. I guess the ASUC was involved for their input, but someone in the administration must have been putting this together for some time, and it had gotten crystallized to this extent.

Well, I talked to someone: "Could we have a program for the thing?" And they were interested.

Riess: You didn't need to ask permission to make it a problem for your graduate students, did you?

DeMars: No. There was nothing secret about it, or anything else. This was before a competition was to be held or anything. This was at least a couple of years, you might say, before.

What we did was gave the problem out, and again, somewhat-- it's very much in the terms that it finally came out with all these buildings. We had a couple of stages in which the students were invited to question any aspect of it that they had reservations about. Some of the people in the class thought the site was too small to hold the theater, which would be quite a big building, because even then they were talking about a major concert hall, and I don't know whether they said it had 2,000 seats, I don't think they cited it, but it would be a large theater, and there would be a second theater.

Well, some concluded there wasn't room enough for it in the site. Most of them agreed with the notion that the dining facilities ought to be toward the creek and Sather Gate, so that you could get as close as possible to campus. And then there was a student office building in it, and then the student union building itself. And although I don't think it called for a plaza, most of them--and maybe I pushed them on it--felt wouldn't it be nice to have a plaza. I think it was just sort of assumed: what do you do, you have a group of buildings, a kind of open space in front of the theater, you need a place where a couple of thousand people can spill out on occasion. That, to me, was obvious, and I think they probably went along with that.

Some of the students removed the theater, put it someplace else on the campus, and others didn't. Most of them, in fact, I think all of them, including ourselves, more or less ignored Sproul Hall. That was just like what was across the street on Bancroft, what about that? And Dwinelle Hall, what do you do about that? And the gymnasium, what do you do about that? I don't think most of them recognized it as a piece of urban design that was there. Although I did try to get them to begin to appreciate that certain things that are there are not going to be changed, and it's bound to have an influence on what you do. But as I say, I don't know that any of them really gave Sproul Hall a setting the way we did in our competition scheme later on.

So they did the problem, they enjoyed doing it. I think I had a class of about ten or twelve, and so we got at least six or seven rather interesting little models out of it. These were done at a very tiny scale. They would fit on a one foot by one foot thing, so I think the scale of the buildings were maybe fifty feet to the inch, maybe as small as a hundred, which is really tiny scale. They were done in color, and so forth, little blocks.

Well, this was the first time anyone had come up anyplace with a conception of what this might actually be like, and so the ASUC was very much interested in it. They displayed them in the Stephens Union, which was the student union at the time. Faculty saw them, and I guess administration people and so forth. And I don't know where it first came from, but this might have been then the fall of one of these years, they were saying these were all very nice and so forth, but they really were needing something which would be much more detailed, and could they have a model that could be used for display, and for fund raising, further interest, and so on? Over the Christmas holiday, could we come up with a design and build this model?

Riess: Who is "we," now?

DeMars: Well, the architecture--. Somehow or other, Esherick was involved with it.

Riess: So it was somehow the architecture department was supposed to come up with this thing, or your firm?

DeMars: No, just me personally, with--I think Don Reay must have been awfully busy or something, because we were already working on things, and we had some other projects going on, so I got Joe Esherick, and he had a couple of bright students, and I had two or three bright ones. We decided to have what's known as a charette. We've talked about a charette before. The profession is using that now, it's when you get together for a crash program, and you do it.

Riess: Day and night.

DeMars: Right. And over the Christmas holiday, we would do this. We had to do the crash problem of the design in a real hurry, because it was going to take some time to build the model. (I have several Kodachromes of the model, and I'll dig them out for you sometime. I think it would be interesting to throw it into the mix.) The theater was in it, and it's where we had it in the final scheme too, but it was much smaller, so we mustn't have had a concept of how big this would have to be to do all the things they wanted to do in it. It's conceivable that the number of seats was not yet proposed, and that the drama department hadn't really gotten into the act to that extent. But it was enough so that it took a position on the model.

But the other things, there was enough of [the program supplied] that the office building was at least eight stories, and we had the student union building. We made a lovely model. It included a piece of the gymnasium, Sproul Hall, Dwinelle Hall, and

Bancroft--all of the surrounding things, you see. It made a very convincing model, and it looked like an exposition in Sweden or something. All white and very international style. It had a radio mast in the middle that came up.

Riess: Where was it coming from?

DeMars: Out of the plaza, at the exact right spot, wherever that might be. I think it had to have some guy wires too.

Riess: Sort of like an obelisk?

DeMars: Well, no, it would be literally a radio or television broadcasting thing, because I think there was some word about that. They already had KALX, I think that was in existence at the time, so we thought this would be a motif, and you could see it from around the campus.

Riess: So it was supposed to be a landmark.

DeMars: A landmark, to call attention to it. So, that was done.

Riess: For whom was it actually done? Was it for the ASUC?

DeMars: That's what I don't remember. But it was put on exhibition there.

I think what happened then, when it came down to deciding to actually go ahead with this thing, that there would be a competition, I guess they may have consulted Bill on this, who again suggested me to be on it. Then, instead of putting, say, Esherick and DeMars together to do the thing, they got Esherick to write the program, which you have in the readings thing [readings on the history of campus architecture put together for a class in the College of Environmental Design]. [looking at readings] The only thing that it doesn't contain is the detailed areas of the different parts. It's mostly on the philosophy of the design and its purposes.

Riess: "Program of Competition by Joseph Esherick." In this competition, it sounds like you were certainly on the inside track.

DeMars: Yes. But you could argue this point. I guess they could have just simply given us the commission, and I think if they did, it might not have come out as well as with the feeling that we had to actually try all these alternatives, which I can discuss a little bit later.

A former student of mine was on the team from Los Angeles. There were three teams from Los Angeles. They invited three firms

from northern California and three from southern California. This was because the regents insisted. They would not have done it otherwise, I think. And in fact, after this was over, if one of the southern California firms didn't get it, which one of them didn't, they insisted they wanted a new student union [at UCLA] too, which they got. It's bigger than ours, naturally.

This former student of mine had been working on one of the teams, a very bright and very outspoken young man. Afterwards he came up and said, "You know, it seems unfair that you are right here and know all the conditions." I said, "Look, you went to school here for four years. The very things that we did that are recognized, the fact that the sun is never too hot here, yet you put all your terraces on the north to keep them in the shade for southern California, and so on." He said, "Yeah, that's right."

So the question is, should the people who know the conditions be excluded, to see what people who don't know what the conditions are, what they might come up with? The others could be used, you might say--well, as we mentioned earlier in the study of the control group of architects, if these brilliant architects from Los Angeles can come up with a better scheme, well, fine, we have to accept that. But as you remember, the way the jury came out it was sort of one, two, three: all three of the northern California things. If they were going to take it seriously, I wonder whether any of them came up here and looked at the site. It would be interesting to know.

Riess: Did they get a fee for their work?

DeMars: Yes. I think we were paid \$6,000 this time. So that cost the regents \$36,000.

The jury commented at the end that ours was I forget how many square feet under some of the other schemes, and at the current price that was a million dollars cheaper than some of the other schemes would have been.

Riess: Were you working in that direction?

DeMars: Not other than my old Farm Security feeling of not being wasteful, I suppose, and only being wasteful where it counted. But we were given definite dimensions of things, and accommodations to be taken care of.

One of the things that the jury asked for--and this was very elaborately done--you had to submit on tracing paper outlines of all of the mandatory spaces from your scheme, with the square footage of them. They could lay these over your drawings and see

whether they were in fact this size, and then add this up and add certain multipliers that were used for halls and other such things, and see first whether you had qualified, and whether none were under, or at least sufficiently under to be disqualified. In other words, you had accommodated the whole scheme. Then, at the end of that, what did it take to accommodate this kind of thing? And it was from that that they saw that ours in its total square footage was quite a bit under some of these other schemes.

XIII THE INSTITUTE OF PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH STUDIES
ARCHITECTS

DeMars: At some point--I'm sure we can find this date--Wurster was approached by the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research.¹

Do you know how it came about that there is such a thing as that institute?

Riess: No.

DeMars: Well, during the war [D.W.] MacKinnon and a group of psychologists had been brought together to find and screen people to take on projects of great danger. (If Ollie North had been around at the time, he would have been on the team.) They were interested, because in psychology most of the personality studies before that had been with personalities that were flawed in some way. You studied them in institutions.

Riess: Abnormal psychology.

DeMars: Abnormal ones. So, what is the opposite of that? What is the unusual personality that would take on the dangerous mission, and how would you find out what their make-up is? Well, they found some of the people who were of that sort, already proven themselves, and they ran them through some kind of psychological tests, interviews and all kinds of things, like running mice through a maze to see how they react to these different things.

Then the war is over. And here's this group of people who have made a lot of these studies and found that there was some correlation between certain types of personalities and the ability to be inventive and opportunistic and all the things that are needed for that particular work. Well, what is another phase in psychology that could be studied? One that had not been studied,

¹The results were published in 1961.

or at least not pinpointed as to what constitutes it? Could you find out what it is that makes some people creative?

They decided to study creativity, and among the groups they were going to study were engineers, artists, architects, novelists, women mathematicians, nuclear physicists--maybe physicists in general. I'm sure this is listed someplace. The thing was, in each case, people who had shown success in accomplishing the thing they were involved in, and therefore you could find the successful people.

They dropped artists out at an early stage, because they felt that it was such a state--

Riess: Not measurable.

DeMars: Well, could you really tell whether this was genuinely an indication of creativity, or has it something to do with the acceptance of just weirdness or whatever, as some would do, or were there really genuine creative urges coming out. Now, no one would deny that Picasso, no matter how weird any of his things that he did, was an extremely creative guy who was trying every kind of a route. He tried everything. He tried things that people hated, but he also was capable of doing quite beautiful things.

They also got some strange letters back from authors and so forth, "How can you study creativity? You're out of your mind." They'd write him [MacKinnon] back a very beautiful letter telling him it was an insult to intelligence, or something. But I don't know if they dropped it, and this is probably part of the record, who else they got. Why women mathematicians I don't know, but maybe it was harder for women to break through into the group, and that they'd have to be particularly creative to make it.

But the architects seemed to be his favorite subject, because for some reason or other they had so many different aspects, the personality, that they had to become successful. They had to have certain talents in certain lines, adequate talents in others, and certain abilities. They couldn't be quite as wild as artists would be, and go off in their corner and do their thing, and then it would be either recognized or it wouldn't. You had to convince people to spend a lot of money to do what you were doing.

In fact, he said the architects have what they called around the place "the briefcase syndrome"--I think that was the term they used--they sort of arrived with this package of things which were costs and pictures, and all kinds of things, to back up what they were proposing to accomplish.

Well, they put this study together, and to start off with, they went to the dean of architecture, and they asked Wurster to make a selection of some members of his faculty whom he thought were sufficiently au courant, knew what was going on, to be able to name the creative architects, in their opinion, the most creative contemporary architects. So Wurster picked--I think I've got this right--Don Olsen, Joe Esherick, myself, and Philip Thiel.

Riess: Who was he?

DeMars: He had been brought in to teach some of the introductory courses, along with Jesse Reichel. In fact he, in a sense, was to be an assistant to Reichel in these introductory courses. Both of them were working under the general direction of Charles Eames. Eames had been brought in to design the course, and what he thought beginning students in architecture needed to get some of the fundamentals--not Greek columns, but what were all the sort of things they ought to have a feeling for.

Riess: Is this the Architecture I-II sequence?

DeMars: That would have been Architecture I in those days. It has gone through a number of transitions since then.

But Eames would come up and show them movies, and have them do all kinds of projects of collages and things. So Thiel was very much into this. His background though, interestingly enough, he graduated from MIT in naval architecture, and went into architecture later with some disillusion about naval architecture. But he was a thoughtful guy, and I think Bill Wurster saw in him another dimension of how he would evaluate--to pick these architects.

We first met with a luncheon, and I think Bill was at this luncheon, though he was not to be part of this group. I don't think that he made a list he was suggesting. The four of us were not to discuss it with each other, but we were to make a list of the dozen most creative architects in the world, or more if we wanted to. So we would name Corbusier and Gropius and Wright and so on. (I think they told us that they were going to consider inviting them to come to Berkeley, and be interviewed, and be put through certain tests, so no use calling up dead ones.) [laughs]

Then they took these lists and found the ones we all agreed on. Then, the ones on which two or three agreed, but one didn't. And then down the line to some that only one had mentioned, and others had not. Then they sent this list back through again, to give our comments on these, and would we make a readjustment. We

jumped through several hoops for them, and they were also making book on our answers as well.

Riess: They were observing you?

DeMars: Observing and evaluating somehow how we answered these questions, and why, and then I think later on we saw the whole list. So we had a number of meetings with them.

Riess: You're saying that you were, in a way, part of the study.

DeMars: Yes, just a little part. But we got that impression later. I don't know how much they could deduce from this, but later on we met with them several times, and heard what was going on.

They did invite--well, Frank Lloyd Wright declined. We all had Frank Lloyd Wright on our list, and they felt he wasn't absolutely essential, because in one sense there's no question he was creative. It wasn't necessary to have the most creative people, it was just the people who were definitely creative.

Riess: Besides which, Wright's personality was already up for public consumption. It had been for years.

DeMars: Yes.

Then, a second list were a group of people who had worked in the offices or worked with or worked for the top rank, whom they felt were in those positions because they had enough sympathy, they were creative enough to want to be part of that movement. They were also creative enough to be hired by the persons, and often had much to do with that. So that was a second level of creativity.

Riess: And who suggested them? You weren't involved with that?

DeMars: No, they pursued that by some other means.

The third list was the control group of architects who were in business but who never worked for the first list--maybe that was all, maybe that was their only guarantee.

Well, they got numbers of people. Many of them are good friends. I know Philip Johnson came out, and Warnecke was on the list of people interviewed. Ralph Rapson, you've heard me speak of him. He was one of the guys from MIT, and a very creative guy, without any question. I think I probably included him on the original list.

I guess I must have been chairman at that time, because I knew all these guys personally, and after the last session--what they would do, they would bring them out on a Friday, paid their way here, and they had a cocktail party the first night, and a dinner. Then, the next day they would bring them in groups of five or six, because one of the things they were studying was how they related to their peers, and some of the sessions went on as discussions, and they were evaluating whether they were modifying what they might be saying by what they found their colleagues thinking.

Well, anyway, first they had this cocktail party. Then the next day was an all-day session of all kinds of things. They would sit in five booths, and were given questions. They would punch a light, yes, no, or don't know. Then they were interviewed. They even asked whether they would be willing to be hypnotised. Some I think said yes. Then they had a very personal interview, on very personal affairs--their sexuality, and so forth. This is all in the story that comes out at the end.

Then they had most of the day Sunday, and finally the thing terminated at 4:00 on Sunday. Almost the last thing that they had them do was, they were put in five booths where they were right next to each other, but they couldn't see each other. Then there was a board in front of them on which they could see how the others answered certain questions. Now, this one question that they were asked, the reason it's interesting is because when they came to my house, a couple of them were just boiling over with indignation.

What it was, was: In times of great national urgency, stress, time of war, do you think the right of free speech and free press should be denied, or abrogated? Each one was told that he was the last one to answer the question, and each one had to wait. The question came on, and they had the names up there in front of them, with the others. One came on and said, "Yes," and a second one came on and said, "Yes." The third one was yes, the fourth one was yes. Finally, it was your turn.

Afterwards they came out and found that each of them had been tricked by being led to believe that, in fact, maybe all of the others said, "Yes, it should be." So, with all your other four guys saying yes, what would be your answer? Now, I don't know what all of their other answers were, but I know that Warnecke was indignant that they played this trick on him, and that he might have been conned into answering yes, thinking, "What would they think?" They didn't tell us quite that. So we had quite a party here. [laughter]

Riess: It was their first chance to compare notes?

DeMars: Yes. Because the rest of the time they were not supposed to.

You probably have seen MacKinnon's report. You know about his thing on architects?²

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Well, this interested me later, and it's relevant--I think I mentioned it earlier--I found that one of the characteristics of some of them was that they were not necessarily good students. They had the capability of just almost ignoring certain things that they shouldn't to balance out their education, because they were so completely fascinated by the particular problem they were on that everything was allowed to go by the wayside. This was one of the characteristics.

Well, that described me exactly. Not so completely that--some artists, you are given to believe that they don't eat, and all the practical things of life are set aside completely. Architects, if you have any experience at all, you can't do that. But earlier on when you're a student, you haven't found all this out yet: you've got enough common sense to sort of balance that out a bit, but at times, you'll just not do that problem set. You'd rather get the design thing done that you're taking to the professor tomorrow, and to hell with mathematics.

Riess: Once these conclusions were made known, do you think teaching in architecture changed?

DeMars: Yes, I think it did. And MacKinnon, I know he went around with this package internationally, Sweden and so forth. He was always talking about the architects.

It had so many other shades to it. There were sexual things. I don't think this was pinpointed, but Philip Johnson is sort of admittedly gay, and there were--. This particular increment, you might say, of personality, I don't know how they managed to assess it, but the quotient was in there, and in their final discussion as well.

Riess: I take it there were no women who were studied.

DeMars: I don't think there were at that time.

²"The Personality Correlates of Creativity: a study of American Architects," D. W. MacKinnon, 1961.

Riess: It would have confused the issue tremendously, in a way.

DeMars: Well--[laughs]. There wouldn't have been any question had Julia Morgan been around. Currently there are some very capable women, like Beverly Willis in San Francisco and Chloethiel Woodard Smith in Washington, D.C.

Riess: Were there any repercussions after it was over? Were there any pluses for having had Philip Johnson and all those fellows out for a weekend? Did they lecture to the students? What more did you get out of any of this? Anything?

DeMars: No, they didn't lecture, because they were too busy. They were absolutely, Friday through Sunday, and then most of them had businesses [to return to].

Riess: So it's not that the students got contact with all of these people.

DeMars: No.

Riess: How widely did the study become known? Do you know?

DeMars: Well, I think that other people have gotten hold of the report and heard about it. I don't know how widely distributed it is. It would be a source of comfort, or otherwise, to those who knew about it. I don't know whether the AIA nationally--oh, I'm sure that they were aware of it, but whether they broadcast it particularly, I'm not sure. They should have.

Riess: Why would it be a source of comfort?

DeMars: Oh! Just to maybe get some notion of how you tick, I suppose.

Riess: You mean, as you measure yourself against these other people.

DeMars: Yes. And some people who don't find themselves listed as the most creative--well, they wouldn't know, but they'd see whether they fit into the description, into the specification, and make their own judgment. You can imagine somebody saying, "Well, I don't give a damn about that anyway, because I have no pretenses," or, "I think I'm creative. They don't think so. Why--" Well, of course, they wouldn't know. I don't know that they ever listed who were studied.

Riess: Those you named, yes, they were creative, but weren't they all flamboyant personalities, people who get a tremendous amount of press? What part does that play in all this?

DeMars: That was part of what went into the briefcase, the briefcase personality, I imagine.

Riess: Yes, you referred to "briefcase syndrome" earlier, but I don't understand really what that means.

DeMars: I think it means that as a package of all these things, to be successful in the image of some of these people, you have to have a bit of a flamboyant personality. That would be one item. To sell what you've got to do, you've got to be sufficiently knowledgeable about all the things that feed into a building as well, sufficiently to be able to support what you were selling, and so on. You had to be a reasonably pleasant personality, so that you don't turn everybody off and they won't cooperate with you, I guess.

XIV WURSTER HALL--AN INTERVIEW BY GEORG BUECHI¹

Buechi: Vernon, could you please give a short chronological account of the planning process of Wurster Hall, highlighting those steps which merit, in your eyes, special attention?

DeMars: Chronologically, to say how did the architects get selected? Now, that is covered, I believe, in the account that Sally Woodbridge has given.² I've probably told the whole story right there, and maybe what I should do is sort of move on into the architects starting work on it. Then, we might flash back, and I'll take a quick review of Sally's thing to see if she covered all the bases.

It was the experience, when Wurster was dean at MIT, that they had an association of several members of the faculty to do an important building for the campus at MIT. (That's the apartment building for faculty housing.) This is all detailed, I think, and it tells about some of the advantages and disadvantages of that thing, in Sally Woodbridge's article.

Buechi: What is going to be especially interesting is kind of leading us a little bit to the whole planning process, more in detail, at what points certain decisions were made.

DeMars: I guess I was chairman of the Department of Architecture at the time, or a little before. What is the date that we were working on this? Sixty-two or something like that, wasn't it? [pause] Well, let me jump back so as not to waste your tape, unless you want to turn it off a minute. I'll try to touch on a little bit of what happened before the architects started planning, because

¹Georg Buechi interviewed Vernon DeMars, Don Olsen, and others in the course of doing research for a Ph.D. dissertation in architecture, Interpreting Buildings as Interpretation: towards a hermeneutics of building, University of California, 1991 With his permission the DeMars interview, conducted March 22, 1988, was transcribed verbatim for inclusion in this oral history.

²CED News, Fall 1984.

I'm sure that our knowledge of the process of planning of the college itself had definitely some influence on it.

Now, I would say that Esherick was really probably not involved in that, because I was involved as chairman of the department, and maybe even before that, by Wurster, who made a committee of Kent, representing city planning, Violich, from landscape architecture, and myself from architecture, to start discussing how bringing together these departments could be made into an operational unit, in which, as Sally quotes Wurster, "At least the professions can learn to work at cross purposes together."

But here again, it had these overtones of our experience in Farm Security, where we had been working closely enough with engineers and so forth that we learned to respect them, and they learned something about how we worked. I mean typically, the professions are taught so separately that they don't even know how the other people were taught, why they have these predispositions to certain kinds of things, or certain assumptions about the way the other department, the other professions work. Engineers had a way in Farm Security of really feeding directly into some of our design concepts, because they were right there. We didn't finish something, send it to the engineers for them to fill it out, or vice versa, which sometimes happens, where the engineers engineer something, and you're supposed to put the architecture on it.

And then, of course, we also knew that these professions are separate. In the 19th century, I think a city planner was an architect, wasn't he? A Beaux Arts architect could also do landscaping, couldn't he? Those great schemes, and so forth. And there were landscape architects, and great ones, but don't you think that many of the Beaux Arts architects felt quite competent to do the paths and the things?

Buechi: Oh, sure.

DeMars: Because they'd seen it so often, and so forth. And then maybe you got these other guys to really do it later. But each--there was an inclination for the architect to think he knew it all about all these other things.

Well, it had become quite evident, even by this time, that architects, certainly in this country, were not doing much city planning. That often would be done by engineers. And site planning was almost unknown as an art form, you might say. People like Olmsted--of course, he was a landscape architect--did great parks. But those are always thought of as separate design objects themselves, weren't they?



Topping-out ceremony for Wurster Hall, UC Berkeley, April 1, 1964. Left to right: Edward Strong, Berkeley Chancellor; Vernon DeMars, architect; Joseph Esherick, architect; and Donald Weirick, contractor.

Photograph by Vano-Wells-Fagliano

And to be able to plan a whole city was something just outside of the American experience, almost, except the very early ones. Some of the early ones, from Philadelphia to Savannah, were actually purposely planned in a certain way to create a certain kind of lifestyle. It went quite a bit beyond a gridiron plan in which anything could happen. And of course, the Greeks used the gridiron; so did the Romans, and so on. So it has its merits, but to use it creatively was a little bit outside the general American experience, as well as the training.

So anyway, Wurster's experience of being close to Harvard-- he'd gone from here to Harvard during the first part of the war, where he took an advanced degree at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, which he always thought as a name sounded like a place where they work on women's hats. [laughter] We had to find a name for this out here. And why didn't we call this the same? The "California School of Design," or whatever? At first, it was called ACPLA--Architecture, City Planning, Landscape Architecture. Well, that's a terribly clumsy thing. We had an awful fight to find something that didn't include the word "architecture," and I think that story is probably told in here someplace.

Buechi: It is, yes.

DeMars: We were conscious of the hope to form both academically and administratively a structure that made these into one college, and that they had a relationship to each other. And then also recognize the fact that these disciplines, these professions, were different professions that practiced as separate professions, and were very jealous of it. What they [landscape architecture] really did professionally was a whole kind of thing different than what the other two professions did, architecture or city planning. And yet, they were growing apart, because of the specialization. We felt that it wasn't necessary to make a general environmental designer. Though that's come back as a preliminary sort of a thing, as a background for more specialization.

But we were hoping that by the proximity to rub elbows, to see each other's exhibits, to have joint lectures, and this kind of thing, they would begin to see what the other professions did. Whether you had overlapping curricula was a hope at first. Well, we know what the story has been, that some of that's happened, and some hasn't. In fact, in some ways they've almost gotten more frozen into their separate parts.

I'm going into this once more in some detail because this obviously had an influence in our minds on the planning. This was a very definite thing we were trying to accommodate. I know that

in some place you're going to ask the question about all of the architecture studios stacked up here [referring to the north tower-like element of Wurster Hall]. Well, it was because the drafting is a long-time, space-consuming activity, and to stack those up seemed logical. You could have the professors more accessible down at the entrance level. Certainly the offices are more accessible, the staff and other things. Farther and farther up are people who are going to be spending more and more time, in blocks of time, using the elevators. The design studios are typically four hours, plus many more at their drafting boards. So, you can see this rationale--it makes sense so far, I think.

Buechi: Yes, absolutely.

DeMars: We were hoping for a sense of really quite separate identity, both for each department or profession, and for the building itself, that they not be just three doors in a row, or something, but that they have a little bit of an area around them separated from the others, and yet that there would be kind of a joint thing that would come together. I must have recited the same thing before, that as we worked on it I was trying to get a more--I think Sally calls it "romantic" here--.

Buechi: Picturesque.

DeMars: Yes. Well, it wasn't just to be picturesque. It was because I wanted the lobby to have more of an open well feeling, very much like the big hotels do now where they have an atrium, and planting and so forth, and it's the place where you go to have cocktails and everybody's there. I was trying to get a hole in the middle of this where both city planners and architects and others would hang over the rail and look down and see who's coming and going, and this in itself would be kind of a heart to the building.

Well, you can see it got kind of squeezed in on. I was the one that insisted on that court that's on the main level there-- and it got meaner and meaner as time went on.

Buechi: Oh, you mean the small court?

DeMars: Yes, not the big court. The small one. I thought that should be a bit bigger, and it should be a definite thing you'd go and sit in, and so forth. Maybe doors should open out into it, kind of a patio, obviously on a different scale than the big court. The big court in the old Ark building on the north part of the campus, that courtyard there was what we'd call a patio, but not really, because it wasn't enclosed.

Howard Moise had been the architect for that new wing of the Ark.³ It had to be fire-proof, because that housed the library, and they were worried about some valuable books that were stored in this very flammable building. So it made quite a nice court, with everything opening into it. And then the students bricked over the courtyard, and that's where we held our commencement exercises--not really, it was an annual ceremony of the architecture department, and they gave out awards and prizes and all that. At first, the commencement exercises were held in the Greek Theatre. Then later the student body got so big, they held it in one end of the stadium, with a backdrop halfway in. At some point, they felt that a football-sized crowd had lost its appeal to individuals and families; you couldn't see your son going up there to get his diploma--or daughter (have to say that quietly). So then is when they broke it down to having each college have its own commencement exercises.

But back to Wurster Hall. We assumed a brick court, and we tried in whatever schemes we were working on with the thing always to wrap around that court. But I was trying in this little additional court to get some identity at the entrance to the building that made you feel that this was where it was happening. My colleagues apparently didn't quite agree with that.

Buechi: And that leads into my second question. Who were the people involved in it?

DeMars: Let's see if I've finished the chronological account of the planning process. At first we simply gathered information. There were subcommittees of the different departments, including design, which was assumed by us was going to have an equal role in the whole thing. I still think it should have, well not equal in dimensions, but it seemed to me it's one of the inputs. Because we're really talking about the man-made environment. That was a term that got to be used later, and it's rather a good comprehensive term. Part of the man-made environment is interior architecture, and interior furnishings and so forth. It is very much related.

I really think that typically in the architecture curriculum you're not getting exposure to the specialties that go into interior architecture even. Taking you through a typical problem, I don't think students now get as much experience as we got when we had the Beaux Arts system design. We'd be given an interior ballroom to do now and then, or the interior of a such-and-such,

³Walter Steilberg was the architect for the library wing, and Moise did the connecting wing of faculty offices. VDM.

as a complete problem. Of course, now they say, "How can you have an interior if you hadn't designed the exterior, and how can you even think of it without studying the sociological problem--" and so forth. Students now barely get a plan worked out; they hardly have time for interior design!

Buechi: Can you remember a few of the basic schemes which led to the realized scheme? Were there very different proposals at first in the design book?

DeMars: I guess what I wanted to say was that each of the programmatic parts of it, square footages and so forth, had been fed in by these separate committees. Our first thing was to digest this, and I would say, as a team, we were working very much together on this, as a brainstorming kind of a thing.

Of schemes that we got into, I think that the planning office at the University was using us as a somewhat--I wouldn't say "free," we were being paid fees by the University--but I think they were trying out a whole number of different uses of the area around the building, and here they had some paid staff, presumably talented, capable architects, to see where this and other buildings could go. So we were working on pieces of site clear up to Piedmont Avenue, as I recall, and were even encouraged--parts of the building could extend into where the parking lot is now.

But when it finally began to come down to reality, they began lopping off chunks of square footage which you weren't going to be allowed to have. That was one of the things that took place in the planning process. There were several of these earlier schemes.

And then, a couple of other things. I had an office, and Joe Esherick had an office, and Don Olsen had an office. We didn't have a central office. I had a bigger office than the other two because we were deep into the student union building and so on, so we would meet in my conference room, which was down on Shattuck and Center Street. This is where the joint sessions would take place.

Then we'd take these packages back to our separate dens like a bunch of spiders, you see, and work on various problems or concepts. As I say, during the first analytical parts there was pretty general agreement. You had floor areas, functions, and activities to accommodate, and what would be possible dimensions, and you stacked these up, and you began to get a three-dimensional bunch of floors, and so forth. Then we began to get down to the final square footages that were being permitted and we began to work a bit on possible schematic expressions, you might say, and

here again, Don Reay was working very--are you talking to Don Reay? You haven't met him yet?

Buechi: No, I haven't met him.

DeMars: I'll have to have you meet him. He had a very important role in the Student Center competition. Then, as the buildings developed, and I was pretty busy with a number of things--.

Don was sort of project architect in our office. It was just the two of us at first, doing work on the new college building. I think any plans being done, Don was doing. Then we would discuss things. Don had done--and I wish we could find this someplace in either of our two archives--some very imaginative free-hand sketches, almost in Mendelsohn's manner, very free, a shoe factory, a building for such-and-such, conceptual, no plans or anything, but a couple of such things which are really very interesting, and very sculptural.

I would say at that time Don Olsen was doing very Miesian things, very much gridiron of steel, and so on. I don't know what Joe's earlier things were like. They were probably more in that direction, but probably thought of as in concrete. Maybe Don's might have been intended in concrete, but it seems to me they were expressing almost an exposed steel structure.

Well, if you want to stay chronological, there was a long period of time in which it all sort of came to a halt. It wasn't progressing much, and Wurster got really sore. He got us and knocked our heads together one time, and said, "This is an important job, and you guys don't get very many of them this big," and so forth. He said, "When are we going to get on with this?"

That was about the time that Don Hardison volunteered to leave the group.⁴ "Would it help if he did?" he said. Shortly after that Don Olsen said, "You know, we seem to have three totally different directions we're working in here." He didn't quite say that, but he said, "Joe doesn't seem to like what you and I do, and I think that if we just said that we're going to have Joe do the working drawings, maybe the whole thing would get

⁴By the time we got to Wurster Hall I had an office of quite some size, maybe fifteen people or something. We had then done the Student Center. But I think they still thought that the combination of another big office with ours could do a thing like the--or that they deserved to part of it. So, it was still DeMars and Hardison, Esherick, and Olsen, a four-member architectural team, and we hadn't really worked out the details of a joint venture yet, but that's what we were going to do.

moving, and we would have our input and so forth." I said I agreed, to get it off dead center. Have you heard this before?

Buechi: Not exactly like that, but yes.

DeMars: I think he even said, "If we go on like this, we're going to lose our shirts, or we won't get a chance to, because Wurster's going to take it away and give it to some architects who will get it done." [laughs]

Buechi: Who were the main players in this project? Here I mean not only the designers, but also people from the University who would have to be named as important for that project. I'd like to know what their respective impact was on the building as it stands today.

DeMars: I've touched a bit on the departmental people pulling it together. George Simonds was the one in architecture who headed the committee that pulled together the actual floor areas after the sort of programmatic concept, and so forth, and the program writing.

We had been picked to be the architects at an early stage. Well, it was DeMars, Esherick, and Olsen--D, E, and O. That had nothing to do with talent or whatever. Alphabetical is always the safe way to get over those things. And this is why Alvar Aalto leads the book on the architects. [laughs] For other reasons, I think he should, too.

Some of the other people: Louis DeMonte was very important. He was the campus architect [head of the Office of Architects and Engineers]. He was in I think a stronger position than I see at the moment of anyone that would be called the campus architect. He had a really strong role, and he met on the committees that were proposing new buildings, and their siting, and really, I'd say, got his way. He was an architect, graduated from here. He respected us, knew us all very well, but this didn't keep him from calling a spade a spade, as we say

Buechi: In the Wurster Hall building, could you trace something completely back to DeMonte's impact?

DeMars: Well, the first thing would have been leading us into doing the site planning, with pieces of the building extending up into other parts and so on, and then lopping them off, which I think he probably knew from the beginning he might have to do. [laughing]

The main players from landscape architecture, and city planning? I can't even remember--well, maybe it was Jack Kent.

Buechi: Did they have any impact on design, or were they all involved with individual programming?

DeMars: Well, programming, and then reviewing and meeting. This was not popped on them, you know, they saw it develop, and it was presented to them periodically. They all are part of--guilty in the crime. [laughs]

All right, Wurster came out in 1950 to be the dean. I had come here the year before him. I was hired by the former dean [Warren Perry]. I had heard that Wurster was interested in being dean here. He brought the ideas from both Harvard and MIT of getting these departments together. He started off in that, although at first he was made dean of a college of architecture. Because a dean has to have a college, it was called the college of architecture. I think that's the way it worked.

"College" means a gathering together, really, and that didn't happen until later, but it was in his plan. I think this had already been discussed. I know it had been discussed with Jack Kent, and it had been discussed with the chancellor who brought them on. One of his purposes in getting Wurster to do that, bring these department together, was because, among other things, city planning was what we now call a loose cannon, reporting directly to the chancellor, and they wanted to get all departments to report to a college. City planning was going to have to join up with engineering, or with political science. I think those were the options. Jack Kent opted to go this way. I know that he and Bill Wurster had talked about this before.

Buechi: What was Wurster's impact on the building, per se?

DeMars: Well, one reason for the building was the fact that architecture was bursting at its seams. We used a couple of those temporary buildings that are down in the glade there. In fact, we held some classes in what is now the dance studio of Zellerbach Hall, which was a little Unitarian church. We had classes in free-hand drawing over there, clear across the campus. A lot of classes were scattered around. Architecture alone needed a new building, or it needed to expand, and it really wouldn't have made sense to expand it right there.

Buechi: How much do you think that the building of Wurster Hall really was influenced by Wurster's ideas?

DeMars: Well, Wurster's firm's office--it was always in that North Beach area of San Francisco. The first time it was on Jackson, catty-corner from the Golden Gateway. That building was where Thomas Church had an office; they shared an office together in that

building. Then they moved a few blocks up the street, and I think bought the building and owned it, on Sansome Street.

The next thing was this larger building, which was literally right under the brow of Telegraph Hill, in what had been a quarry for filling the bay. It is a concrete building, a really rough exterior with no pretense at architectural expression, which some other industrial buildings of brick in the same area definitely have.⁵

This was a building type known as "slow-burning," probably responding to the earthquake and fire of 1906. The exterior would be masonry, fireproof, and the interior completely framed in heavy timber construction, all detailed according to code: wood columns were 16" square with all corners champhered off so fire can't get started. This went for any beams and girders as well. Then the top of the column had a cast iron cap with a U-shaped socket for the heavy girders. Finally, the floor was of 2 x 16s slapped side by side. You had a solid wood floor 16" thick with no edges for fire to catch onto. In a bad fire, the surfaces would char, a little. A bit of wire-brushing, a coat of paint, and it was good as new.

This had been a cable warehouse, to handle the roughest kind of work. There was a railroad siding right up against the building, and the unloading platform where they rolled off the huge cable drums was, and still is, paved with half-inch steel plates.

Little by little it got gentrified. They whitewashed the inside. By this time, Halprin had quite a bit of work, and they were using a couple of lower floors. Here was this rough--I'm leading into the idea of the ruin, you see--I think he [Wurster] saw this as a place where the building was not imposing its architecture on the designers inside of it, because it was simply this found object, a neutral background, if whitewashed and modified completely.

It was capable of being modified. You could put in new partitions, or you could tear them out. You could put some bright objects in, you colored things, you built some new stairs, you put an elevator where there wasn't one. But it still was this rough ruin of a building that you saw. Even now it looks like one [a

⁵Wurster's firm did one of the first examples of "retrofitting" industrial buildings when they turned two handsome brick, ice warehouses a few blocks away into quite elegant interior decorator showrooms. [VDM, September 1991]

ruin] on the outside, even though they've given it paint jobs. You'll have to go see the building sometime.

I think his imagery all the way along was that--and it worked well for his firm--you broke through a wall and worked some more space in, and you kept renting out to different tenants. Very flexible, because the whole space was open floors. (That led into the open floors of the drafting rooms here, though I thought they'd end up being whitewashed inside, or something. Well, there are parts of it that sort of have.)

Then here we were over near the art building, and he thought that--. He was a very good friend of Gardner Dailey, who did the music building and the whole art complex. Of all the buildings artists shouldn't work in! Artists are messy, aren't they? They spill paint and clay, and stuff gets around. A building so nasty--neat, like the art building, it just seemed--. And it's rather precious, in a way, in its detailing. I think it's a less successful building than the music building. That seemed very fine. You don't make messes in the music building, you make tunes. Hertz Hall is a handsome hall. But even that I think he felt was almost an effeminate building.

This place [Wurster Hall] should be rough--not anti-feminine, not anti-women's participation in architecture and planning and so forth, but just simply the building--. You're going to build things that should be capable of being knocked about without showing it badly. So this had an influence. The obvious only choice was concrete, because that was a logical way to build a medium-high building in our time.

Buechi: Is there anything about the building today which you could trace back to a specific demand of one of the departments?

DeMars: Oh, yes. Did you know that there was a glass-blowing factory in the--?

Buechi: The decorative arts.

DeMars: The decorative arts. There's a bronze factory, a complete operation to make castings. So that is an obvious part.

That whole end wing I've been a little bit out of touch with. All the workshop things are in that one wing. That's a logical grouping, isn't it? And the workshops above, and so on. In my day, in the Beaux Arts curriculum, we had no such a thing. We had sculpture; we modeled in clay. Later that was gotten rid of and taken over by the art department. They did have a workshop where

there was some rudimentary use of carpentry tools, which now, you see, is an important part of the earlier training.

Buechi: New question. What were the major constraints in terms of costs, program, site, and also campus plan, formal elements, which were imposed on the design team?

DeMars: Yes. Glad you asked that.

Buechi: It seems to be important, that specific.

DeMars: Yes. Wurster was on a committee called the Campus Planning Committee. This had representatives from other departments, and they were doing long-range planning. You could see the pressure of building programs coming up and so forth. One of Wurster's goals was to rescue open space by forcing some buildings to go up in the air. This was being applied to this campus, because it has a very beautiful natural area. And I agree with this myself.

Well, where was it appropriate to put a high building? Usually pulled apart from other high buildings, again on that general theory. (I hope they're still observing that.)

Then, back before the decision to group it with city planning and so forth was the question of whether architecture should be grouped with engineering, which the early building was. The test laboratories---. The facilities that had to do with building and construction don't have to do with city planning, and they don't have to do with landscape architecture, in a way.

I think it was finally decided that it was more important that the conceptual phase of this should decide the grouping. And that grouping might have been in the engineering area, but it came at a time when some of the sociologists and others said that there was more reason to have architecture and anthropology, the study of man, grouped together. And here's anthropology with its museum, and the art museum, and music. Maybe that makes sense. Right now, I'm not sure. I don't know how much exchange there has actually been between the art department and architecture.

Buechi: That ties into the whole question, how much human exchange can you determine by spacial determination?

DeMars: Surely. Unless they were literally taking a number of courses in the art department. An architect has to know how to draw. Okay, you took drawing in the art department. Freehand drawing. We had life class. You had a course in art anatomy in the Beaux Arts system. After all, how did you learn to draw these angels holding up swags, and all this kind of thing? Then we had a term of life

class, drawing from the unclothed model, and that was always a course you could get a unit for.

Well, then there was less and less of that, and we got our own people teaching drawing, and so forth, it was a specialty. And by then I think also they had less art drawing in the art department. Who needs drawing from the model to do abstract expressionism?

But anyway, that was Wurster's very definite input on the location, site point of view.

Buechi: And the tower, you were saying?

DeMars: The tower. It was quite evident early that this [architecture] would be a logical department to stack up into a tower. Now, the only argument you could make about that is maybe the elevators are a problem. I mean, not maybe they are, they are. If it were four floors high, you might get a lot of them to walk up and down, or even five, although I think you'd have to have an elevator for five, but then they would start using it. Of course, a lot of these buildings are four stories high. They have an elevator for wheelchairs, but you're expected to walk up and down.

Buechi: Well, actually you end up walking in that tower, because the elevator's way down, so--.

DeMars: Yes, that's another one. They thought that the first few floors they'd walk up to. But the lazies come in there at the bottom floor, and they'll take the elevator to get up to the next floor, practically.

I wanted a grander stair in that entry area that didn't look so much like a utility facility. The kind of stair I would have would be in the kind of space I would think where there would be a rail around that you can lean on and look down and see people from all sides, some of the kind of ambiance you get in Zellerbach Hall. People love to lean on the rail there and see who's down below. You don't see much of that in Wurster Hall, because the only people down below are walking up the stairs.

Buechi: Okay, what about the courtyard? Was that imposed?

DeMars: The courtyard was kind of imposed. In the first place, we knew we held our graduations in there, and also, over there [the Ark] it was very much used as a place for outdoor--you take models--even classes sit out there. We thought it was an appropriate thing to do, to make a court and have it one that would be paved, not just a garden court.

The courtyard was a kind of historical residual from the courtyard of the Ark. I talked about that. So when it came to Wurster Hall I always assumed it was going to be brick paving too. Joe and Don, I don't even know that they ever even said, "No." They just saw to it that it was not going to be brick. That's a very sentimental material, you see. Picturesque, regressive, all the wrong things. They wanted honest asphalt. [laughs] Even if it cost more to have asphalt, asphalt is what we'd have. We could have afforded brick in the first place. But we didn't have it. I like a little bit of humanism worked in among my modernism.

Let's see [referring to Buechi questions]: cost. There were restraints on cost. They never tell you how much you've got to work with, quite. They just tell you how much square footage you're allowed, you see. But I do understand that it came out as really a very economical building. The structural thing was quite unique. Now, I'd say that was purely through Esherick's input; I think he had a determining thing with the particular engineer that we used, Izadore Thompson. But this was a very important aspect of the building construction.

Buechi: We have a question about the structural system.

DeMars: Okay, let's leave that until later.

"Cost, program, the campus plan--"I think you've got that.

The formal elements: in the front you had the music building making one part of a quadrangle, that open space with the court. The face to the west certainly gave a setting for the western exposure of the building. And I think that's quite a successful thing from a distance.

As you see it across that play field, from the far side where you can't see the cracked, crazing concrete, and the fact that it looks like an old sidewalk, from there on a bright sunlit day I think the building is quite successful. And when you come through the little arcade of the music building on a sunny afternoon, and you see all these shadows and things, it really has a rich texture. But on a gloomy day, when it's wet, and with all the water getting in the cracks, it looks like hell!

And I can say that because I really disclaim personal input on the actual textural detailed form of the outside. Although I think both Don Olsen and I had a deal to do with the geometry; all three of us pretty well agreed on the geometry and the general location of the thing. So in the campus plan this was one kind of

a setting, and it's not unlike, you might say, the setting of the forecourt of Versailles, for one thing.

The garden side is quite another thing, isn't it? That was really the private side. The other side was the public side. I think that is really the effect here, that you can mess up the court, and clean it up, and it can be used for things. The other side has a public presence that has one kind of a character, and I think the inside character is sufficiently differentiated from that. Is that enough?

Buechi: I think so.

The sixties were a time when the design professions underwent heavy criticism from outside and inside. New approaches surfaced everywhere, ranging from the strictly scientific to the formalist approach. Was the planning of Wurster Hall guided by a coherent concept of design and design-education? Which one? And how does it manifest itself in the building?

DeMars: Well, let's see. Of the architects that were really involved in the design, probably Don Olsen was the one with the most nearly transitional approach to architecture. He studied with Gropius and the group at Harvard, so he was getting that viewpoint.

My professors were John Galen Howard, who was the planner of the campus, did the Campanile, and so forth. He was one of my professors. The others were all Beaux Arts-trained, graduated from the Ecole des Beaux Arts. And our ideal in those days was that you won the Paris prize by competition in the United States and were sent for a year to Paris, you see. Otherwise, you really didn't have much of a future in this country as an architect. That was what we believed.

Halfway through my training, modern architecture hit the fan, as we say. [laughs] We were converted rather quickly--not totally, you see, but--. And also, we had people like Wurster doing work in this area which showed the influences of the modern movement. The students knew about this. Professors knew about it too. In fact, the dean of the school thought Wurster's work was awful. He just was against it.

Do you know much of Wurster's buildings around?

Buechi: I've seen some of them, yes.

DeMars: His was always a regional kind of approach. He knew about the international style; we all did. We thought it was kind of factory stuff. Anyway, that was my trend.

Esherick had a combination of the two, because he claims that he had a Beaux Arts training at first. But I think he studied with Lou [Louis] Kahn. He had some of the people who were definitely the early transitional movers in this direction, who had themselves probably had a Beaux Arts training. And being in Philadelphia, he saw the buildings going up around there, and in New York.

So those were our backgrounds. And then, of course, no one is more of a purist, or let us say more unbending, than a confirmed--or no, a born-again sinner? [laughter] Anything that Beaux Arts did, you couldn't do. It even happened in our Farm Security work where it would have been nice to have nailed some little shutters on the houses for outside decoration, even if they wouldn't work. Well, our poor farmworkers--we would give them a trellis, because you could grow a vine on it. That was functional. But even if it didn't look like home without shutters--. So that's how purist I was at this early stage of my career, you see.

Joe Esherick was really quite a confirmed modernist in the houses he was doing in this area. Don Olsen was rather a strict constructionist, in the term that they used for the supreme court, speaking of the constitution. You hue to the actual construction of the original constitution, not what their intent might have been had they been living today, you see. I would go part-way along. Zellerbach Hall I think represents some development on my part. The dining commons itself, that's totally different, that's not frame construction. The enclosing walls are mostly glass, and true curtain walls, since they are not the supporting structure.

I think that Joe was really responding to the local influences of frame building. He doesn't pretend to make the walls artificially thick, like the adobe presumed to be. But I think his heart is in Miesian solutions.

Buechi: So that was really kind of your common ground in approaching the design of Wurster Hall? A rather strict modernist view?

DeMars: Oh, I think that. No question about that. It would be a modernist view.

And with Bill Wurster's willingness to accept a ruin--. And by this he meant a thing which is just a quite literal translation of the problems of the case, and its function. Functionalism, but I would like to carry it a few steps farther than mere functionalism, see. I think Joe Esherick took functionalism, carried it a little bit farther structurally. I think it has a sculptural movement in the outside which many modern buildings

lack; it has some depth. Using these pre-cast columns with the necessary structural element projecting out, not being in the way on the inside, and getting some of its lateral forces taken care of by that, it's all a perfectly logical thing. You don't have to apologize for any of those elements, really.

The only thing, if it had been my decision I probably could not have conceived of making a bunch of awnings out of stuff six inches thick just to make a shadow on the window. I would have felt--I would say that was unfunctional. You see, the functional thing would be to have a series of awnings, I guess. Canvas wears out too soon. I would have tried to find a material that wouldn't wear out as fast. I remember seeing a building in Berne, I think a chemical factory, where the awnings were a continuous strip, and if a cloud came over the awnings all pulled back up, according to a photoelectric cell; when the sun came out, they ran down again. Do you know this one?

Buechi: Not exactly that building, but I know the system, yes.

DeMars: I think the Swedes were doing this too, where you used awnings, just the simplest, but it became decorative, a note of color. Well, if we'd done that it might look like a resort hotel or something. So there's a certain strength, and unity, the way it is.

Sculpturally speaking, that thickness is probably correct, because with the vertical elements of the pre-cast elements, and so on, these horizontals need to be about that thick so they didn't look too papery. I can see that making it all of the same material gives it a sort of classic impact, like the Parthenon, or whatever. The early great marvelous classic buildings were really just all carved out of one piece of stone. There was a unity. In this case, it does that.

My main complaint is that the quality of the finish, when you're right up close to it you'd never mistake it for travertine! I was very much conscious, when we were doing the Student Center, of trying to get textures and finishes that right up close had a tactile and pleasant effect. The thing that I feel about Wurster Hall is that it has all the charm of an old sidewalk sitting around Berkeley. We get so we don't allow ourselves to see those things.

I remember one of the things that impressed me in Europe was that sidewalks might be made of pre-cast elements, with a certain regularity in the way they were laid down. Streets were cobblestone paving. Here a street is asphalt, and is patched, and has oil stains. The sidewalk is various squares lined up, with

cracks across the squares. We don't see that, we just walk by. But when you think of the area that streets and sidewalks fill in the compositions of buildings, it's like if you had some old dirty carpets in a room, and all the rest is beautiful architecture. So that would be my concern about the building, that it did not need to have been quite so crudely specified. Is that enough on that?

We were aware, in the sixties, of some of the experiments going on and some of the people. Now, I swear that Esherick--because this wasn't really the kind of stuff he did, typically--I think he was caught up in what the British call the new brutalism. [roars] You know. No nonsense! In fact, he went out of his way that he wasn't going to design any lighting fixtures, or have anybody design them. You got them out of a catalogue, the way if you were doing a gymnasium or an underpass, an industrial fixture, it's already made, and that's why you see these around.

Well, that's an aesthetic in itself, isn't it? He didn't want any designers monkeying around designing a fixture.

Buechi: Were you guided by a concept of how to teach design too?

DeMars: Well, I think conceivably. My criticism with students was to lead them along: "What was it you were trying to do?" Sort of help them in that direction, if it made a certain kind of sense. If I thought it was too illogical too early on, and it was going to waste his time, I tried to explain why I thought this was so. If it was just a question of not my preference, you see, whether he wants to do it this way or that way--we probably weren't that far in early planning.

One of the things I found, with the breakthrough out of the Beaux Arts system the students wanted to spend all their time on the plan, to make it work, you see. That's something you could know, whether it's working or not. The architecture, they don't know that, so they got less and less experience in dealing with the aesthetic of the architectural solution, with what the building is going to look like. There were students with projects due in three days, and they'd just finally almost gotten the plan, if they could only get these toilet seats to work out in here! To hell with the toilet seats at this time, you see! And when you cut off with a flat roof, that took care of the rest of the things.

I think that Joe had a definite aesthetic that was emerging out of that. By this time we had handed it over to Joe to do the work and drawing in his office, and we would meet weekly and he would show us what they'd been developing. And at this time he paid a lot of attention to what we said. Before, when we'd show

him our things, he [laughs] would-- (If he hears this, or reads it at sometime, he'll probably agree. He may not have known he was doing this.) His way of being a critic was simply not to agree with what you were showing him, not to either say yes or no, you see, but simply, "Hmmm," and then he would go work on his thing. This is forgivable, I guess. Now, I don't know what he tells his students in his critiques.

I think Don Olsen would be leading them along his direction, a rather purist interpretation of things. I would hope to get them to deal a little bit, manipulate their things a bit more, and not simply let the engineering and other necessities dictate the scheme, and say finally, after this plan, you erect some verticals and cut it off at some height, and you've got the building.

Buechi: Is that what you would say Wurster Hall is about?

DeMars: No, I wouldn't. I say it because I think that Esherick's-- And then, of course, have you seen some of the schemes that Don Olsen did?

Buechi: A few.

DeMars: Yes. His very much go up the number of stories it takes for this, and he cuts it off, and then pretty much the same treatment. Of course, it ends up with the same treatment on the outer walls, but they are sort of applicable. And the modifications, there are still little modifications in that that express what goes on inside. I think the engineer's input gave it its final textural form, which I think is good.

And then, the fact that the inside was a kind of an unfinished thing, the notion of the ceiling form seemed logical. It could be an acoustical form also, and those acoustical pads are in there, but also the actual shape is somewhat acoustical. And it also has a certain richness--it has like a coffered ceiling. To me, it's more interesting than having a bunch of flat ceiling hiding the lighting fixtures.

Also, and as Joe points out, to get all this duct work criss-crossing over, which happens, the place where the fattest one has to cross establishes how much lost space you have in there, waste space, in a sense, and you could gain that additional sense of spaciousness, which I think it does. And then, why shouldn't the students, while they're in a place like this, begin to learn what goes behind those flat ceilings?

Joe did this in his office. He had quite a bit of input on reorganizing the duct work that the engineers were putting in, not

just where they put them. I can see that. It seems to me that in the tower I can't imagine running them anyplace else than down the center aisle, and having them diminish as they go out. But that expresses itself. But other places, I think he was able to get them to modify the engineering layouts.

Buechi: The concept of design as an interdisciplinary process, what we've been talking about, where the sciences and the arts meet, has been pioneered in the Bauhaus. How does this College of Environmental Design relate to the Bauhaus? Does it? How does Wurster Hall relate to the Bauhaus ideas?

DeMars: I think there was more give and take between all of the faculty in the Bauhaus, almost trying to do each other's things. I think that the painters and designers got influenced by the architects, and vice versa. If there was drama and dancers, they made costumes that looked like cubism--isn't this so? I think they were all talking about the same revolution. The revolution has passed, sort of, here, and I don't see either the students or the professors in the different departments exchanging many ideas with each other.

Buechi: But could one say that the Bauhaus in some way was kind of the ideal of Wurster Hall, maybe in Wurster's mind, which unfortunately wasn't entirely realized? Is that fair to say?

DeMars: I think so. But after all, Gropius coming to Harvard, I think even there it was already more departmentalized, don't you think?

Buechi: Absolutely.

DeMars: No question about it. In fact, he was not the dean at Harvard. Whereas at the Bauhaus, wasn't he the head of the Bauhaus?

Buechi: For a while he was head of the Bauhaus. Then Meyer, the Swiss architect, was in the early twenties head of the Bauhaus. Meyer was the latest of the Bauhaus directors who introduced a very strongly socialist bent to their work, and an extremely rationalist and pragmatic approach.

DeMars: I think in Europe, with the destruction of World War I and the great need for housing, the Bauhaus approach made mass housing more possible than the kind of housing that might have been done, even for similar purposes, in the 19th century with more time, maybe.

When you think about it, the Bauhaus, Gropius, Harvard, Wurster going to Harvard--. Harvard and MIT both had faculties and curricula rather similar in some ways. Wurster, having been

deeply involved in both of them, saw what was different about that than the training he had, and what he saw was still going on in Berkeley. It's really a pretty straight linkage, I think. I hadn't thought of it that closely before.

Buechi: A last question: an integrated College of Environmental Design cannot escape the conflict between unifying and separating the different design specialties. How did this conflict affect Wurster Hall as a building?

DeMars: I don't know that it affected the building, except with a degree of ignorance, maybe, out of not realizing their impact. But I think we were aware of those factors, of these two tensions.

Buechi: Yes. But the building, for instance, from the outside, does not show a separation of departments. It's a pretty continuous building, and the articulation of the building does not necessarily indicate the different departments inside.

DeMars: Yes. That's true; oh, yes. Except that if you were standing outside and wanted to point it out to someone, you'd say, "That block there is mostly a city planning block," which is true. The tower is mostly architecture. This middle piece here is faculty, and rooms. That links the two together. The south end is all of the workshop things, the decorative arts and so on.

Remember that bi-nuclear house, or whatever, you complete a building, you have a linkage. Well, like I've got right here, you see. You can't expand that kind of a thing. Supposing there's a need that grows. Maybe landscape architecture needs changes--in fact, it is changing, and they're getting into more things. They might have needed another floor to move up into the highrise building of architecture. City planning could expand and take over parts of this.

So, the fact that the same building flows around, and they do have points where they touch in the structure, they could very easily simply expand into some extra space in the other section. I think that flexibility is there. I think we had that somewhat in mind, rather than in any way trying to express that. And I suppose maybe we were trying to express the unity of the concept of environmental design. But I don't think so, because if it were one building, one material, you had some deep indentations that said, this is this wing, and that. I think we felt that the amount of space these places needed shouldn't be frozen, and it could have the flexibility of expanding or contracting a bit, which has proven itself in what's happened in decorative arts, hasn't it, in a sense?

Buechi: Yes.

DeMars: Which I think is too bad.

[interruption]

Buechi: April 18, 1988, interview with Vernon DeMars on Wurster Hall, continued. Last time, we stopped at a question where you discussed the conflict between the unification of and the distinction between the different design specialties within the College of Environmental Design, and how that conflict or non-conflict was resolved, and how it affected or did not affect the building. We were talking a little bit about how much the building responds to kind of a unified concept of the college, and also one can kind of distinguish certain parts of the building as more or less belonging to a department. You pointed out how at the same time, within the shell of the building as a whole, each department to some extent has the possibility to expand and to change, following its needs. That was kind of where we left off the discussion last time.

So the next question is the following: a part of the rethinking of the design practices in the sixties was questioning the drawing side of the designer's work. Does the fact that in Wurster Hall the design studios are stacked away in the tower have anything to do with it?

DeMars: I don't think that when this was planned that the de-emphasis on drawing had occurred yet. This came along with the counter-culture, and you might say over-emphasis on social problems and so forth of the late sixties. I believe you could legitimately say that. Even the Free Speech Movement was '64. The building had been built by then, hadn't it?

Buechi: Yes.

DeMars: So I don't think that there was the feeling yet that architecture had abandoned drawing as one of the tools of the trade.

Buechi: It was pointed out, I don't remember right now by whom, that somehow the book, the library, became kind of the center of the building, maybe responding to a view of the design professions as becoming more theoretical or more having to deal with that whole set of other information, which presumably can be seen in book form, as opposed to putting the emphasis of the designer's work on the drawing side.

DeMars: In the Beaux Arts days, the library was an extremely important part. What do you copy these things out of? So I think that was

inherited right from the earlier Beaux Arts system, all the great volumes on Versailles, or full page drawings of details.

Now, I would almost say there might have been, with the sort of modern movement coming in, a little less reference to the classic library things, and more to the current magazines. But even then, there's a full collection of the important magazines going clear back to I'm sure the twenties and even earlier. And then, of course, it was thought that the library was the one joint thing that without question would be used by all of the departments. In other words, each department wouldn't have its own library.

I would say that the studios are simply reflecting the fact that because the studio classes take place usually twice a week for a four-hour period--two to six is the typical studio time--it's assumed the students are there during that period. That's what goes on in the tower, depending on the pressures of which classes and so forth.

Buechi: What would you then say was the main reason behind deciding to put the studios in the tower, as opposed to putting administration there, for instance.

DeMars: The administration is something that students go to, to pick up mail before they go to the class. In other words, the fact that they're going to go to that floor level and pretty much for that period of four hours in the afternoon, they are there. They're not going up and down the elevators, and running in and out. Whereas, running in and out is what goes on in the administration sections. There's logic in that being central to the whole, those parts taking fewer people using them, not a whole class of thirty people descending on the office, and so forth, the professors coming in one at a time. There might be a dozen, as far as the pressures on the space needed. It seemed like a logical arrangement of demand. Does that answer that one?

Buechi: I think very well. With the following questions, I want to go back to the ways the design was done, so we kind of go back in time a little bit. How did the work evolve within the design team? Which parts of the work were done individually by the individual members of the design team, and which ones were done collectively?

DeMars: The analysis of the needs, the space needs and this kind of thing, was all done collectively. Then individually people might go back and, with the programmatic elements decided on, square footages and general location, I think everybody took a crack individually

at what it might go together into, what kind of a geometric thing might occur.

Olsen came up with a very blocky kind of thing at one point. In fact, it was kind of a square. I think Esherick mentions that Bill Wurster looked at this and said, "A square tower is ugly." Period. [laughs] And so, Esherick says, "We dropped that one." [laughter] I'm not sure that we always took the master's word at face value, but we thought it was a little--[laughter]. Wurster was a guy with a very definite opinion on things. Usually he could arrive at this very quickly, and it was very often a matter of principle, just like that statement. "A square tower is dumb." So we'd struggle some more with the thing.

Progressive plans showing the development it went through may be available. Between Esherick and me, we may be able to find those.

Buechi: [I understand] the design was done individually by the design members, and when it went into the production phase, most of the work moved to Joe Esherick's office, and that's then where the meetings were held. I don't get from Don's information an indication that at any point there was anybody central working for the design team as such.

DeMars: Yes, I think that's right.

I think the final form and the detailing and all that has very much the imprint of Esherick's role in the whole thing. There was pressure to get on with the job, and we were determined to not just be coming in and being a monkey wrench in the system. Okay, we decided that, "Joe, here's the paintbrush; you paint the picture. We've all decided what it's going to be." That's the analogy I often use. The three artists get together, decide they're going to do a mural or a painting of such-and-such, and we may even decide a whole number of things about the painting. But finally, only one guy can hold the paintbrush.

Buechi: So that leads us, really, right into the next question. How do you personally judge the team approach in this particular case, from today's vantage point, and from the vantage point of the time when you were directly involved in it? Was it positive, was it a negative experience, positive, negative results?

DeMars: I think that the team approach allowed--or kind of guaranteed--that, again, the form would have more than one opinion creating that form. I'm talking about the geometry of the building. I don't know what alternative might have emerged if only one person had done the entire thing from the beginning. I'm inclined to

feel myself that I don't know that I would have done it any differently in the shapes and parts, but I think I've already mentioned that I was trying to get certain other things to happen in it which simply didn't happen. They were simply quietly not agreed to by my colleagues, one way or the other.

As I said, I pushed for that court. As a practical thing, it is a light well, you see. But I thought it could have been a little more generous, and really made more of. Being near the landscape department, I thought that they could take over. If the Danes were doing it, it would have been a luscious little thing: the light would come through the greenery of trees and things. You would have participated in it to a greater extent and it would have made an indoor-outdoor room on that level.

It was almost as though they had as little window looking into it as possible, and for a long time it was just a cement floor, nothing in it at all. Finally, they had to raise some funds, and Don Olsen did the treatment of some tiles, which I didn't think was exactly a piece of exceptionally moving landscape [laughs]. There could have been some more interesting sculpture. It still seems meager. It was thought that it would have been a place you could have walked in and sat on the bench. Now they're afraid that you might have something dropped on you from above.

So there was a case where I suppose that my thoughts were considered romantic, and Esherick was determined that the word romantic was not going to be allowed into the concept at all.

Buechi: We are getting into that in the next question. Sally Woodbridge labels Vernon DeMars' approach to this building as picturesque, Don Olsen's as anti-romantic and formalist, and Joe Esherick's assumedly as somewhere in between. (Although I might be wrong in that interpretation, because she doesn't attach a label to Joe in that article. You might be able to fill in.)

Could you describe the three designers' approaches to the project, highlighting differences and congruences? To some extent, you have already done that. How did they affect the building? Their different approaches, I mean.

DeMars: I suppose I don't mind the word picturesque too much, my interpretation of it, but I think it suggests someone who isn't very realistic or practical, or functional and so forth, which is not true in this context. I would say that Alvar Aalto is picturesque, but I don't think that anyone would accuse him of being nonfunctional. At times he introduces bits of irrationality just when the whole thing is beginning to be too rational!

There's usually that thing that puts the little twist on the art that Aalto managed. And art isn't always explainable.

Picturesque, I would accept in the sense of forming an interesting picture, that if you were taking postcards, you'd take a picture of that, whereas another composition, no one ever bothered to take pictures of it because it was such an uninteresting composition. Which is kind of true: why do they take travel pictures of certain kinds of groupings of buildings and things? Because they're picturesque. Well. So, in that context, I would perhaps accept the definition. I think so-called post-modernism is getting back into this, which is a release from the puritanism that went along with the modern movement.

Don Olsen has always been very much a kind of purist. His making of his artistic statement is very much in the manner of Gropius and Mies, and the other rather strict interpreters of the early functional movement. And, with great art. Don Olsen used to do one or two houses a year, it was sort of his thing, and he would always get a national award on them. They were very well studied, as the house up here shows. There's hardly any little angles that have not been perfectly--. All problems are perfectly resolved. (And they do make handsome photographs, but on the other hand, I don't think we'd call them picturesque.)

In my case--well, I like to think that I do resolve all the functional problems. Again, what is the definition of functionalism? I think at an early stage there was a great deal of concern that had more to do with just mere physical function. Another one of the functions is the psychological impact on a person, and not only on one who knows all the in-jokes and all the in-bits of aesthetics that a particular group is working on. I think that a work of architecture, which occurs in the midst of the citizenry of all stripes and so forth, ought to be capable of being understood by more than just a very precious group of people who are familiar with the ongoing aesthetic problems.

I think Charles Moore a little bit has sort of fallen into that. He will do things which his little group of people who know what Charles Moore does all appreciate.

Buechi: What about Joe Esherick's position, maybe at the time of Wurster Hall? How would you describe his position? You mentioned earlier that he was very pragmatic, rational about Wurster Hall, right?

DeMars: Yes.

Buechi: Anti-picturesque?

DeMars: Yes, anti-picturesque. But even more so than most. It was kind of a purist aesthetic thing. Corbu would branch into little bits of ugliness here and there, because they had a strong emphasis, and he was also sort of experimenting--he was doing large-scale sculptures, too. I think Joe would deny that: [he would say] if you think you're going to try to do something beautiful, you're going to fail. So you don't do it beautiful, you just do it the way it wants to be, or needs to be. In fact, this is I think very much quoting Lou Kahn.

I respond very much to that particular statement: what does the building want to be? I'm not a mystic exactly, but there are times when I've been involved in things in which I can almost feel what it wanted to be. You can sort of steer it in that direction.

Well, Joe was following that, and it would come out what it wanted to be, whether you liked it or not, in a sense. The cannery [Monterey Aquarium] at Monterey is a very good example of that. He would deny almost any effort to do anything other than--I mean, he wouldn't modify anything for so-called aesthetic reasons, in quotes, you see. You just go ahead and do it. You want a lot of glass here? You have a lot of glass.

But I really think that there is a character to the building that has its own aesthetic, and I think that Joe, although he might deny this, was steering it in that direction.

Buechi: Would you say that Wurster Hall the way it came out was in its material, physical, visual impact, mostly the result of Joe's aesthetic?

DeMars: Oh, I would say so, because I don't see Don Olsen doing the sculptural configuration of the facades in that way at all. And I have already said what I felt about the facade.

Buechi: What are the main considerations behind the choice of the building materials and construction systems? I'm especially interested here in the choice of concrete as the dominant material. Why was concrete chosen? And, as another example, the choice of those plywood panels for the interior walls, which mark very strongly the impact of interior spaces. Why those?

DeMars: These are very easy. No problems. [laughter] Concrete is undoubtedly the economical material of our time.

Buechi: What about steel frame?

DeMars: The tower might have been done in steel frame, because it's ten stories high, but that automatically is more expensive than doing it in concrete.

Buechi: Concrete is associated with the brutalist style in architecture, and was an aesthetic choice too. Was that part of that decision, or would you say it was an entirely pragmatic, rational, economic decision?

DeMars: Well, since the two followed the same path, it made it easy to make that decision. I think there was a desire to exploit the sculptural quality that concrete allows. Since there wasn't the necessity to do it as a steel frame building for any large spans or that sort of thing, I think it was assumed from the very beginning by us it would be done in concrete.

Buechi: Okay, what about the materials of the inside?

DeMars: I think I mentioned before that one of the images that I had that made me accept this approach--and I think maybe both Joe and I were thinking in this direction, and I'm sure we discussed it several times--was the old loft buildings so many architects moved into because the space was cheap.⁶ The exposed ducts and all that--I talked about that before--that was Joe's idea. The students could see what the building was made of. So all of that was going to be exposed.

Smooth concrete walls were very unforgiving for architects who need to pin stuff up all the time. That was really the main reason for the plywood walls, to be able to staple stuff to them, pin things to them. However, you need almost a jackhammer to drive a thumbtack into that plywood, because the plywood had to be fire-proofed. This solidified it into something like rock! But you can see how useful it is in the upper floors, the main floor of the professors' offices, with all the history illustrations tacked on there. I think that's a very useful device. And then, of course, you clean it up now and then, not like the breezeway on campus where anything that's soft enough to drive staples into remains that way; no one ever takes it off. I think those are the two things: the plywood is a little warmer visually, and thus gave you a chance to mount things on it.

Buechi: Another question about the concrete: like you already mentioned, the concrete has a very smooth, untextured surface, unlike other ways of treating exposed concrete. Was there a conscious decision about the surface treatment of the concrete structure made here?

⁶See p. 360.

DeMars: I suspect it was, and it was made by Joe. I don't know whether this was discussed with us. Again, Joe would almost think of this as monkeying around with it, you see. What's typical form work? Okay, whatever the industry uses, that's what we'll do, see. Noissy stuff of coming in and sandblasting it, or jackhammering it, or stuff like that.

Buechi: What was the material for the form work used there? There's no indication in the concrete structure about what kind of form elements were used.

DeMars: Oh, it was probably the plastic-faced--what's it called? For the form work, you have a waterproof plywood with a plastic surface, so that it's perfectly smooth, like a plate.

Buechi: He could have used just the plywood without the plastic.

DeMars: Well, you would have gotten a little texture of the plywood, right? In fact, I think that's what we did on Zellerbach Hall. It's waterproof form plywood, but a slight texture left in it. However, by the time it was sandblasted, most of that disappeared. Then, we used color, and we used a special aggregate which is actually a granite aggregate, which--and I learned this from our engineer--is non-shrinking. I didn't know aggregate shrank, but maybe that's the definition they used. Actually, Zellerbach is really quite free of cracking. There are a few little places, but there's very little evidence of crazing, you know the kind of thing that does this.

Buechi: Yes. Okay, let's go to the next question, because there's more about the same general topic. The outside of the building is dominated by the pre-cast columns and sun-shades you already mentioned earlier, at the expense of other forms of facade treatment. How did the design team settle on this approach? Why were the sun-shades made the main expressive element of the facades?

DeMars: Well, you have to ask that of Joe Esherick.

I think the column is a very interesting thing. If the column were allowed to be inside the building it would take up floor space, interfering with the arrangement of tables and so forth. And they're more interesting on the exterior than they are on the interior. I think the device, the way the floor connects into the column and so forth, is quite interesting. It's all, you might say, absolutely functional--the aesthetic is totally dependant on the way it was articulated.

Buechi: It has been also said that in the Bay Area you don't need sun-shades, because it never gets really hot, and you want to have the sun inside. After all, it's not a tropical climate.

DeMars: And besides, we have venetian blinds. [laughs] But actually they are not completely, 100 percent effective as sun-shades. In the winter-time, of course, the sun comes in, which you can use. But if your desk happens to be in that area, you really can't have a bunch of stripes across the drawing!

No, I think that the sun-shades were an aesthetic as well as semi-practical matter. Without them, the building would have a different character, certainly. Well, you can see it on the north side. But that expresses the fact that on the north you're not supposed to get any sun. It comes horizontally when it gets in in the summer-time.

Buechi: Much emphasis has been placed on the fact that Wurster Hall is an unfinished, open, flexible building. What is open about this building, considering the fact that its structure, its shell, as well as its appearance are extremely permanent? Was it to be temporary, i.e. was the building thought to be finished by later generations?

DeMars: To the extent that it would be adaptable to change. Look what's happened already. Ramona's Cafe was originally an exhibition hall. And that piece of the corridor down there that's being used for exhibitions now, I think there are plans somehow to find a way of semi-enclosing that, so that you can lock it up. But there are problems with fire, and so forth.

And the painted elevator lobbies--one of the first ones was on that level that had the great wave, that Hiroshigi Japanese thing, you know, the fishermen in this great boat, and a huge wave--that was painted on the wall, and very beautifully done. Now, of course, it's degenerated into a place where you sloop a bunch of graffiti and so forth, which is too bad, I think, because it suggests that architects really prefer slums.

I'm a little off all our La Raza business, all the ethnic business of putting their imprint on everything. You've got to hate Cortez, and the oppression of the Anglos to the Indians, and all this. Well, you know, that gets kind of ground in after a while. They live with it. I think they begin to think art has nothing to do with anything else other than politics, and how terrible it is to be a Latino, or some such a thing, or the joy of overcoming the white man. [laughs] But again, that can be painted out.

Buechi: Maybe the next question is the more original one. Wurster Hall has a decidedly "hard" aspect about itself, due to the abundance of industrial materials, the lack of articulation of spaces and surfaces at a small scale, something you have already pointed out as well, and the absence of decoration. To the outside, it shows a close, walled-in attitude softened only recently by the installation of Ramona's Cafe. Do you agree with this description? Was it intended?

DeMars: I think the large aspect is from the west, the main image there. The west is a difficult--if you have a lot of plate glass, for instance, to have it seem open becomes a problem. The entrance to the building is set back for this purpose, to some extent, and gives a loggia effect. It's filled with glass there.

And then you'll notice on the court side it opens out. Almost all the available areas that have no other, you might say, restraints on them, are all glazed in. All of the east sides of the lower part of the building, public spaces, you might say, are really as much glass as you could get for the openings. Is that true? In the courtyard, what you see as you look back at the building on the courtyard side, the public spaces are glazed from wall to wall and floor to ceiling.

Buechi: But at the same time, on the south outside of the building, you have all these walls.

DeMars: On the very south side?

Buechi: On the very south side. I mean, there's a practical reason behind it, the sort of outside areas for the studios. But, they really make a wall between the public space and the building, and again, if you speak about the building without Ramona's Cafe, even that approach is an extremely closed one to the building. Now, it's true, at the courtyard you have that big open face towards administration, but as a courtyard, the other two sides are extremely closed. The library has no connection whatsoever with the courtyard.

DeMars: Sure. Well, they didn't want that. In fact, you notice the library has doubled up on the lids to keep light out. So, in a sense, it's responding in each case to the actual orientation and so forth, and letting the chips fall where they may.

Again, on the south side it keeps the entrances to the building sort of central, anyway, so again, it makes people pretty much all use the same entrances. Maybe by accident they'll meet each other, you see. I'm not sure that that was exactly the idea, but rather than having too many ways of getting in and out of the

building, for instance another one across that whole south facade, where the sculptural and other studios are, you see, down in the ground level, there are ways of getting through that, but I'm not sure that there would have been any particular point in making another entrance to the building down there, or even a spread opening out entrance.

As messy as those things are-- . For instance, that sculpture court on the north side, where the pottery stuff is, it usually looks like a disaster area there. I think they've got them to sort of keep it a little bit less messy currently. But as far as an open effect--well, from my point of view, I don't know whether I would have done anything differently in this if I'd been in charge.

You notice the student union building is completely glass, floor to ceiling, completely around. There was an image that we were trying to get at that time that this was open thing to the community, and that's had its problems in recent years. At this earlier time, students who lived off-campus who were out of school for a while, or whatever, were sort of welcome to participate, if they behaved themselves. It wasn't until a whole generation of young people decided the thing to do was to trash things-- . Anything that was made by the establishment was a fit target to be trashed. They really wrecked the big lounge area in there, the group that lived in--would come in there and slash the furniture, and pee on the furniture. I had managers talk about it, tell about this. Just dedicated to show your anger.

Buechi: Now, that's a good comparison. Going back to Wurster Hall, at the ground level it is so closed. In the history of modernist architecture, the ground floor traditionally was an open, continuous space, and Wurster Hall is just the opposite. Was that ever an issue or a point of discussion in the design team, to really voluntarily close it down?

DeMars: I think it was just almost being too literal about the western elevation and the sun problems, and heat problems, to simply open it up. It could have been set back, but I think we were fighting floor area problems, among other things. And, maybe if I'd had-- I probably wasn't paying that much attention to it. Don't quote me on that. [laughter] But, you know, here were my two capable colleagues, and I was sort of--I didn't take--.

Buechi: Okay. The next question, very important I think: who was responsible for the landscaping around Wurster Hall, and what are the considerations behind the landscaping around it?

DeMars: Joe Esherick used to say he didn't see that landscape architects had any role in things; architects knew what they wanted in planting, they just didn't know the names of bushes. [laughs] I think I can almost hear him make that statement. I know that's the attitude of a lot of them. So there isn't really that much, you might say, design. I think that maybe between Joe and so forth they placed the olive trees in the courtyard. Those used to come up through a hole in the asphalt! After a few years, the landscape department was so infuriated by the brutality of the whole thing, I think they got out and jackhammered--or had it done--so those little lawn areas around the trees were revealed, to get a little bit of something else happening.

On the other [west] side, I think that [Tommy] Church did that landscaping. There are huge areas of path and landscape and stuff there which--they seem all right now, I think. It would have seemed earlier that it could have had a little more--well, those big block things the trees come out of, I think those were added later. I think the original landscaping was just huge path areas that went across, and then lawn and so forth between. It was rather bleak.

Buechi: Every building stands in a history, better in several histories. It carries on certain traditions, and breaks with other traditions. It repeats and innovates. What is Wurster Hall's place in the history of the UC campus, American architecture, 20th century architecture?

DeMars: Well, technically, I believe it was the highest building to be done in pre-cast structural elements at the time. I think that's mentioned in that Italian article. So, technically and conceptually, I think it's an interesting piece of structural architecture. It's high for a concrete building, nowadays as it's seen, and particularly in an earthquake area. Although at roughly the same time, when we were doing the buildings in the Golden Gateway in San Francisco with Wurster's firm, those are twenty-two stories in concrete, without a steel frame. San Francisco does not allow that height anymore without a steel frame.

I think it represents a phase in exploring both technology and the aesthetic, derived from simply a very direct approach to the way a problem is seen. For all the reasons I've said where I have a digression of opinion about the final product or the texture and so forth, the material, I doubt that it would be repeated in that form by anybody. Joe says it has nothing to do with brutalism, so-called.

Buechi: What's your opinion about that?

DeMars: I think it qualifies very nicely for that description. [laughter]

Buechi: There were buildings going up on the East Coast--the Boston City Hall was roughly the same time, wasn't it? Then Paul Rudolph's work.

DeMars: I think a little after. True, that's right, I think one has to say that those were all in that same context. The Boston City Hall, there the use of the other material, the brick down where people are, and this other thing sort of emerging out of it, it has enough scale to justify that. I think aesthetically it's a more satisfactory totality, but it's also evident that they were working on aesthetics to a greater extent. It was very conscious modeling of the thing, in a way that I think Joe was simply not-- I mean, he rejected monkeying around with it, in other words. Let it come out the way it's coming out. Now, that isn't quite true, because certain things are not allowed to come out the way--but that's fine. I think that's defensible.

What's the rest of that question?

Buechi: What is the building's place within the tradition of modernist architecture?

DeMars: Well, maybe those are good places for it to fall: the Rudolph version, the Boston City Hall--. What are any others of the time? Kahn's library building at Yale is certainly that period. Corbusier's convent, La Tourette. Who else was doing things of that sort? In England?

Buechi: Well, of course, the English brutalists, I don't know the names, but it is sort of what also is called the heroic modernism, really a modernism with a very expressive, aggressive attitude.

DeMars: Right, heroic. I would say that the building has a heroic quality.

Buechi: Or really an aggressive one that can't be denied.

DeMars: Yes, right. Aggressive, heroic. And even putting the virtue on what some people would call ugliness.

Buechi: Right. There's that quote from Wurster that he wanted "a building every regent would hate."

DeMars: Yes, and it achieved it.

Buechi: If you look at the building today, what would you point out as its most important successes, and as its most important failures?

DeMars: I've probably covered these already by touching on them, in a sense.

There are various definitions of openness, and the open floors of the tower building for the drafting rooms are always susceptible to being further subdivided. That has taken place to some extent. I think Joe was relating to the main drafting room at Penn, which is a single great hall with a high ceiling. It would be like the Doe Library's great reading room, though I don't think Penn's is that big. But I think that was a certain image that he liked, that you could see whatever else was going on, people weren't all separated. But at Penn that meant the whole school could be housed in that one room.

The old Ark, too, it was very useful to walk through the building. The freshmen and so forth were up at one end, and as you came down you could bypass the studios, but you were sort of permitted to walk through and see what the seniors were doing, and what the others were doing. You saw the work in progress. And this was useful. Now, of course, you don't see it because even if you walk through this one room, it's only the one level. There are so many of the floors, and I don't know to what extent students purposely go down to another floor and walk through among the architects. It may happen; you see more in here among the landscape architects, and they have pretty much the one-room thing, don't they? The drafting room.

But some of the rooms have already been partially divided. I thought it was difficult at times; if you wanted to talk to the whole class, then you had to go someplace without disturbing the rest of the group. Like a Japanese house, you have to speak in low tones, because otherwise it's heard throughout the whole floor, and I think that after the war, one of the things that some generations of Japanese wanted was their own room.

I have said I don't know why the grand stair coming up from the lobby has to be quite what you would put into a shipyard! Why couldn't it have a little bit of more graciousness to it. There was one incident. On the east wall from that stair there was a gap between the stair itself and the wall of about two or three feet, which is covered in plywood--and it isn't merely covered with plywood, it's furred out a little bit, because of a lot of plumbing that came down that wall. Esherick and Olsen, so help me, they wanted to leave the plumbing show! Louis DeMonte said, "No, that's the end!" [smacking table vigorously, emphasizing each word, rattling dishes] "That wall's got to be covered up!" [laughter] I don't know if you have to reveal everything.

Buechi: Well, would you like to add anything else to the interview?

DeMars: I don't know quite what more there is to add. I do hope that there would be a solution to that lower exhibition space, so that one could afford to have valuable things on exhibit there most of the time. This is one of the things that you need, to see what's going on, what students have been doing. It's a shame that you can't.

XV COMPETITIONS, AND DEVELOPERS

[Interview 11: 13 April 1989]##

Riess: You alluded to a group of projects that you were invited to enter, and you suggested that we could speak about them all together. The question, perhaps, is what you would say to future architects in dealing with the invited competition.

DeMars: Well, I found myself trying to separate the different kinds of competitions that there are, and you have already mentioned one kind--the invited one, which is not really the usual, though it is certainly one category. You ask what I would say to up-and-coming architects in dealing with the invited competition? No problem. Take it! [laughing]

Riess: Because you're paid.

DeMars: You are paid, typically. Now, there is a little caveat there. You're not paid enough, usually. If you are an operating firm that is in business with a set of draftsmen, you're paying them salaries, it usually takes more time and more effort, input, and money, thereby, than if you hadn't been invited. [laughing] But it does keep from breaking the bank, and you realize you're going to have to spend more money than that, but it also is income. What typically happens is it may pay for the costs of running the office, if the principals decide not to count their time at all, which is, of course, a possible thing to do.

That's the invited competition, where they want to be sure to get a competent proposal by somebody, whereas an open competition may get all of the young graduates or a few nuts. They can eliminate those, but there may be some major firms that they would like to have had, to see what they got from them or how they would do it, or firms that they feel are particularly creative, or whatever.

Riess: You're saying that the major firms would not enter unless it was an invited competition?

DeMars: Well, yes, because it's such a gamble. A completely open one, with no recompense, means that you're competing against such a large group, and what you do cannot be given the time by the decision-makers to study your solution, if you had something particularly unusual or creative. If a proposal is hard to understand, they won't have time to get into it. This may be one reason we lost the Santa Monica competition. But maybe not. I understand we were the penultimate choice in a field of twelve. Then politics took over.

Typically a large firm that is--I don't think Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill goes in for open competitions, although they went in for the Golden Gateway, because that was a commission, in a sense. That is, they had a developer who hired them to make the study. So that is another job in the office. Several of these things that we were involved in too--and I'll go through them here--are of that category. Those, you might say, are invited. You've been selected to be the one who studies. They're doing the competing--that is, the developer in these cases. And this was particularly prominent a few years back, when so much of the redevelopment was going on, and they put forth large schemes, like the Golden Gateway and so on.

You have listed several of them here, and just to tick them off for a moment--and I'll get back a little bit into some detail on some of them--Stockton, Santa Cruz, Santa Monica, Marin City, Golden Gateway, Capitol Towers. Now, you say these were all projects that DeMars was invited to enter, but they weren't really the invited competition thing. We were invited by a developer to do their presentation, to make their study and make their proposal, and we were paid according to an agreement arrived at before starting work. Usually, it paid on a time basis for this part of it, and then if it goes ahead, you would then negotiate a contract on your fees to actually carry out the project.

Riess: Does the developer have some veto power over your concept?

DeMars: Well, he does, really, at any point, because he's the client. He's the client, and he's going to have to build it. To him, it has to make economic sense as well.

Riess: And he's in competition with other developers.

DeMars: With other developers, who've also hired architects to do theirs.

Riess: Why don't we talk about the ones that are most interesting. I know Santa Monica was considered to be excellent.

DeMars: Yes. It's too bad we didn't win it. But I'd rather jump back. I think I'll talk about Golden Gateway before that, and I'm trying to think in this timing, where the others fit.

Stockton Boatel. Unbuilt

Riess: Was Stockton first? What was that?

DeMars: That was a small project which was very interesting. Tom Flowers had a business investment corporation, Western Urban Redevelopment Corporation. I was a member of it. We invested some funds in it and owned stock. We would meet monthly at Jack's Restaurant, in an upstairs room, and discuss the progress of various investments and other such things.

Maybe, to start in with, I should say that it ended up, years later, that I had lost all the money I put into it. [laughing] I think I invested ten thousand in stock. It finally went into bankruptcy years later. However, all along the way it was involved in a number of projects, and we were paid in these cases. Tom Flowers was a very persuasive young fellow. He knew quite a bit about real estate and investment and so forth, and they had partial ownership of a hospital or two.

So that was the thing at Santa Cruz and at Stockton. Santa Cruz was pretty much of a standard housing thing, the sort of thing that we were good at.

Riess: Tom Flowers was the developer?

DeMars: I guess the developer. The builder himself would be another person, and I think he was also part of the group.

There were only two viable submissions, and strangely enough, the other was Don Hardison of Richmond. His builder was Barrett, who I had worked for on the College Highlands project and also on Marin City, you see. We were all good friends. I didn't know that they were doing that, and the reason why is this was quite a ways along after we did that pilot project in Richmond with Barrett. I did the designs for those. And then the next--there was a big piece of land for which Don Hardison had done the actual planning and so forth, and houses, and I think Barrett built those. My office was into other things, and so [Hardison] took this on. It was kind of natural. I sort of lost out a bit. I don't think they [Barrett] were dissatisfied with me, but I think I was preoccupied with the Student Center and so forth.

Stockton was rather an interesting project. At the actual end of the San Joaquin River, where it butts against Stockton, there's a little spur of land that sticks out, where the river had split or had come in to make the main river. All the rest of the river was either covered up or put in culverts and so forth, so there's a little spur of land there. It's right next to the middle of town, almost. We were going to do a little boatel, and it would have some kind of two-story walkup, almost like a motel, with piers for boats. You would sail down there. It had a little shopping center, which we were doing in a sort of Gold Rush architecture, modernized a bit, with shops and so forth. They had some other elements. But it got into some kind of litigation and finally sort of blew up. We were really disappointed, because it would have been a very nice little project, but we got paid for it as we went along.

Riess: When I ask you, "What are the gains?" one of the gains I assume is that you've got drawings, ideas, and then later along comes a project where they can be used.

DeMars: Well, yes. In the experience of doing it, you very often have gone into quite a bit of research and gone into the codes and things. In fact, for this kind of a competition you have to go into quite a bit more. The typical invited one, where they're trying to get, mainly, some ideas and things, and you're given a prize--. Even the Student Center was almost this; they had figured out, at least, the total square footages and so forth, because the committees had done this and so on.

This other one, where you're working with a developer, they are usually done in a rather general way, and you have to both make the actual proposal for the units, the elements, their sizes, and all that, as well as the builder, who's figuring out: can he build it? And what profit can he make from it? Where will they get the funding? This is the totality of his proposal; it's ready to go with whatever modifications might come. But that one for Stockton, as I say, we were a little disappointed that that didn't go ahead.

Capitol Towers was the first of the category where you went in with the developer. Earlier, we talked about Sydney and Cologne as two examples of ours where the competition is totally open. You submit them. This is one to be entered into, usually, by a young firm which doesn't have a great deal of overhead and has another income from something. Then you do it, and you take your chances. You learn something from the doing of it.

The second category I would call the one we've just mentioned, where you've been invited and paid a fee to do the scheme, and the programming is quite well worked-out beforehand, and the client wants to see what the given program which they've decided on--what would be the alternative kinds of things that this would produce. In both the residence halls, which we didn't win--I think there were six firms that were invited--and the Student Center, in which there were six firms invited, in these cases we were paid as well. We, in addition, were invited to do the Lawrence Hall of Science and also paid for that one. We didn't win that one, either, but we did win the Student Center. That would be that second category, I'd say.

The third category is this one where the developer is the competitor, and the architect has been hired by him.

Capitol Towers. Built

Riess: Okay. I think that's clear. Capitol Towers Garden Apartments in Sacramento [low-rises completed in 1958, high-rises in 1965]--you note that was with Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, Edward L. Barnes, and DeMars & Reay.

DeMars: Yes. The developer in this case was Jim [James Haas] Scheuer from New York. He is now a congressman from New York and has been for some years. He apparently came from a well-heeled family, with some money to spend. He has great social consciousness, but doesn't mind making a buck along the way, and enjoyed developing these things. Before he got to us, he'd done a couple of things in Washington, and thought he'd try it out here.

In Washington he entered a similar contest for the redevelopment of a section of Washington. He got Keyes, Lethbridge, & Condon--this is Arthur Keyes and ones I've mentioned--and Chloethiel Woodard Smith, who was a woman architect in Washington, a very capable one who "don't take no nonsense from nobody." I knew these people, and when this all came up--I think I had another reason to go back there--I met with them at lunch one day, and they told me about the problem of this guy who's always got so many architects, and they all were good friends before. [laughing]

He doesn't pit one against the other, exactly, but it costs more to have too many opinions being thrown into the deal. Inevitably, strong personalities disagree about some things, and then how do they get resolved? They were not in favor of the

concept. I think he had one other architect in it as well, in Washington.

So then he comes out here, and I forget who he knew first, but Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, DeMars & Reay, and Ed Barnes? That's an awful lot of architects to submit this thing in Sacramento. Except, we did win. I would say, after the initial thing, my firm had less to do with the actual carrying out of it.

Riess: How did all three of you work together? Where was the drawing done?

DeMars: The drawing was done in Wurster's office in San Francisco, and Barnes came out a couple of times.

It was to be a mixture of two-story flats, or townhouses, and ten or twelve-story apartments, in an area of four blocks. The central cross streets were cut off. That is, they didn't go clear through the rectangular block, they were dead-ended into parking lots and things. The mixture of low and high rise is partially a concept of mine, as you heard earlier, that people with children fit easily into a two-story thing, and high-rise elevator apartments are preferable for people without children. So that raises the total density. That concept, I think, was what got the project for us.

Riess: What do you think he was looking for from Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons?

DeMars: Just that it was a large firm with a good reputation, that therefore they must be pretty good. I don't think that it was based on specific knowledge of Wurster's particular philosophy. He just picked some names, and undoubtedly talked to people in the East, and probably got my name through Keyes in Washington.

Riess: Barnes is a Washington person?

DeMars: Well, no, New York. Ed is a very nice guy who both Bill and I already knew personally. We also advanced his work. He was already much published in the architectural magazines. Now in the 1980s he's done skyscrapers in Boston and New York.

Barnes came up with a very ingenious idea for the low-rise apartments, in which the one on the ground floor--these were just little two-story flats--looks one way into a little fenced patio that screens off the view out into where the parking lot is. That is, the living-dining area, with a wide sweep of glass, sliding doors, etc., faces into the patio. So the wall closes off the view of the parking lot, but they have this private garden.

The apartment on the second floor simply is reversed. The living areas open onto a large balcony overlooking the malled areas, the walkways with the more public kind of landscaping. So if you don't want to grow flowers and so forth, you get a second-floor apartment. The bedrooms look out on the parking lot side, with small windows for ventilation. You do have a kind of view, but that isn't your piece of land, that's public land. But this thing, one looking one way and one the other, also means the upstairs one doesn't have its main outlook down into your patio, particularly.

Anyway, Sacramento was a second one where we both were invited by the competitors, and won.

Riess: You've earlier talked about the snarls that you get into, though, of being three firms, or three strong minds. How did Scheuer handle it differently than Wurster handled it when he assembled people to do Eastgate?

DeMars: Wurster was the boss on Eastgate.

Riess: Scheuer was the boss here.

DeMars: But Scheuer really wasn't here. You see, he's from New York, and so he got it put together and took our architectural proposal.

Riess: I had the feeling, from what you said, that at Eastgate Wurster pushed you along, but that he wasn't looking over your shoulder.

DeMars: Right. That's true. I was going to correct it to that extent, that he just wanted progress made. He would be there to say, "That's a goofy idea," at certain points, I guess, if it were. That wasn't his role in the thing. He was to spur us along.

Riess: In other words, this was not the first time you had been paired in such a way. In fact, you might have said, "Life is too short to go through this process again."

DeMars: Well, no, because that's a commission. You're being paid for it. And that's one of the things that your office does, you find work. You've asked about, I think, the best size of office for me, and was I burdened by the need to generate work for an expanded staff? As a matter of fact, until practically our last year I don't think we ever had any organizational way of soliciting work. Today that's not a way to practice.

Riess: They hire PR firms to go out and bring in work. Then the work was just coming in to you.

DeMars: We had a reputation at that time, for a while, and we were riding on that. It was all the work we could handle, and when we were the busiest, we had twenty people on the staff in our office.

We started off, I told you, in a room under an elevator. By this time we had almost the entire top floor of the same building on Center Street and Shattuck Avenue, the very center of business Berkeley.

Golden Gateway. Built

Perini, Developer

DeMars: Let's jump to the Golden Gateway. Have I talked about how we got that job?

Riess: No, not at all.

DeMars: Well. All right. This was a major project in San Francisco, of course. It was about seven blocks of San Francisco in the old wholesale produce market, filled with rats and other such things. This was to be redeveloped--totally torn down and then replaced. So it was open. I think twelve developers showed interest. Maybe more showed interest and didn't come through, but twelve developers actually competed. We were invited by Perini Corporation. Perini Corporation I don't think had done any work here. They were from Boston.

I'm trying to trace how we probably came into it. Wurster had been dean at MIT for several years, but he had always planned to return to San Francisco, reestablish his office here, become the dean at Berkeley, and finally live in the house that John Galen Howard had built for Bill's friends, the Gregorys, in north Berkeley. (I think Bill's international reputation was first based on that simple little farmhouse that he had designed for the Gregorys in Santa Cruz. It was widely published.) Well he did return West, reestablish his office, became dean at Berkeley, and bought the Gregory house!

Anyway, for who should take his place at MIT Bill suggested Pietro Belluschi from Portland, Oregon, who had quite a reputation himself. (He received the very prestigious international award, the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects, in 1972. Wurster had received the same honor in 1969.) Belluschi had a

substantial firm in Portland and had done one of the really famous curtain wall buildings that was in all the magazines. It was aluminum and glass and so forth.

Bill talked him into making the move, and Belluschi must have been ready for it. He sold his firm in Portland to Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill--I don't know whether they moved into that building or what, but they've had the firm there ever since--and came to Boston as the dean at MIT. He did consulting work from then on, which he did without any staff. On occasion he may have hired a draftsman or so, but he was a design consultant on many important projects in the East, one of them being the Juilliard School in Lincoln Center, and another, the new concert hall in Baltimore. A firm would do it, and he would visit the firm and so on. He later on did this with us for a while.

Belluschi, Perini--the names seem to be--

Riess: The Mafia?

DeMars: Not so much the Mafia--I'm just thinking of the Italians, who admire artists and so forth. I don't know when Belluschi first met Perini there, but I imagine that he became a consultant to them on some things.

When this operation came up, Perini must have talked to Belluschi: "Who would you recommend to be the architects to do this?" I don't know whether he recommended Wurster first--I think he may have--and then suggested us, too. I had, I think, been more involved in housing than Wurster had--that is, in moderate-income housing. Except for Wurster's war housing in Vallejo, and of course the very successful Valencia Gardens in San Francisco, three-story walk-up apartments for public housing, Wurster had really not done any high-rise housing. Since then they've done things like in Emeryville and so forth.

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Riess: Wouldn't it have been that Perini looked to see that the two firms had already worked well together at Capitol Towers? I mean, wasn't this part of your track record?

DeMars: Well, Perini probably didn't know about that. He was a big builder, owned a baseball team, and probably didn't know who anybody was west of the Rockies, and certainly wouldn't bother reading architectural magazines and this sort of thing. This is my guess. This, to him, was another job for a large construction company. Of course, the people--his lieutenants and so forth--got acquainted with the architects.

Anyway, so let's see. We heard and were invited to the Palace Hotel for lunch, with Bill's firm--Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons--Don Reay and myself. (I'm not sure, whether John Wells was a full partner of ours at that time.) But there were to have been our two firms, and then this representative, Robert Ryan, representing Perini, who came out from Boston to make the suggestion to us. It was discussed, and they wanted us to do it, and he spelled out the details--this is the way it would be, and so on. We were delighted.

Then Belluschi, who had by the time of the Golden Gateway moved back to Portland. [phone ringing]

[pause]

Riess: You had Belluschi as consultant?

DeMars: Yes, and I guess this was the understanding. I'm trying to think.

Riess: Paid by Perini?

DeMars: Yes, he would have been paid by Perini. So he'd fly down from Portland almost every Saturday while we were doing the Perini submission.

Riess: Did you know who the other eleven were?

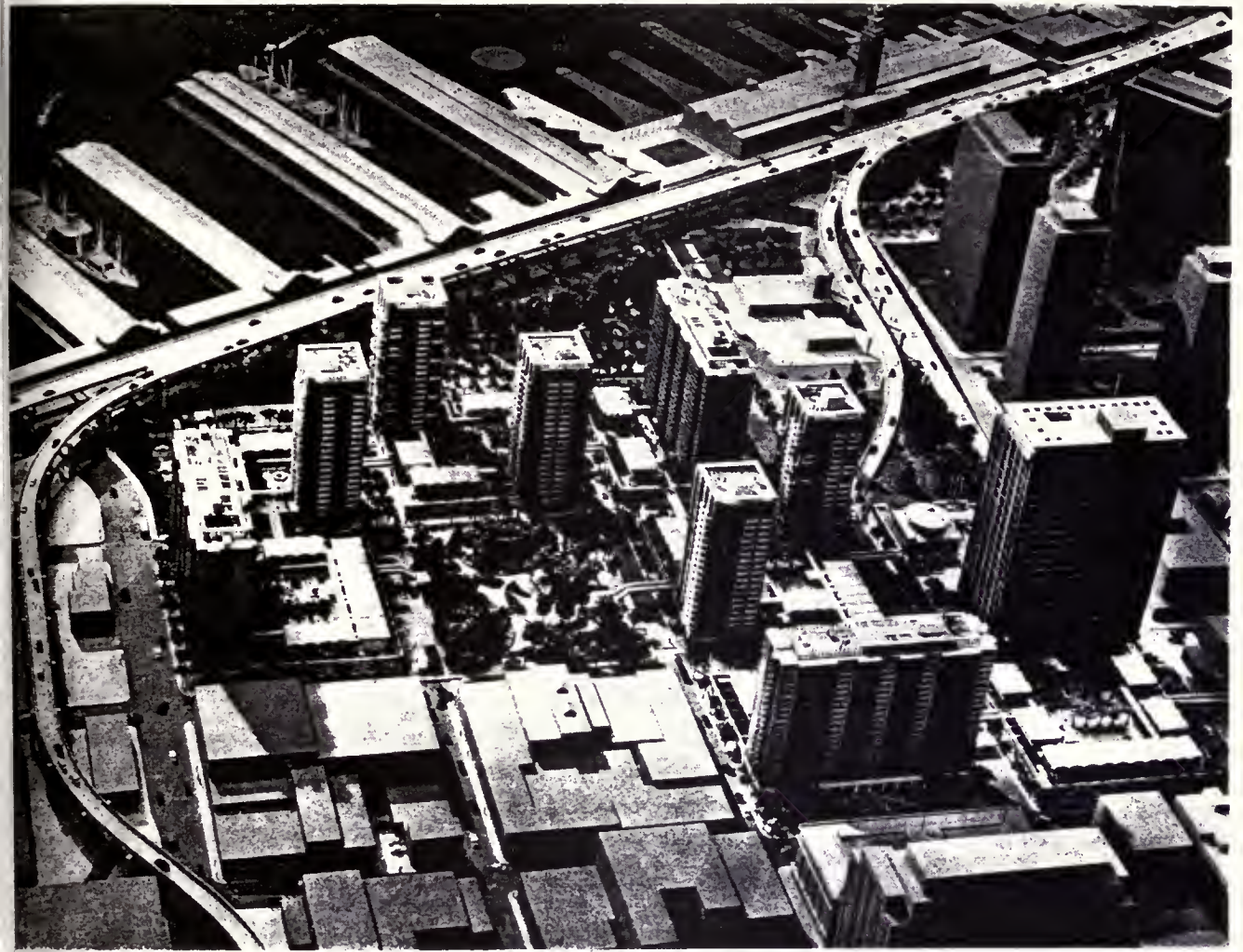
DeMars: I can't quite remember. I don't know that it'd be a secret, because it was not done secretly. I mean, the judging was not--everything was known. Everything was out in the open about the submission, so that they knew who the developers were, they knew who the architects were, and, of course, the last word in the thing was the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency which was conducting the competition.

Riess: You knew from them exactly what they wanted.

DeMars: Yes and no. I think they called for a high density. I don't know that they described it.

The Program, SOM

DeMars: Then, the rules of the game, in this particular case, were quite interesting. I think I might go into this. They hired Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) to draw up the program for the competition.



DEVELOPERS

PERINI-SAN FRANCISCO ASSOCIATES

ARCHITECTS

WURSTER, BERNARDI & EMMONS
DE MARS & REAY

S I T E P L A N ►





SAN FRANCISCO



DEVELOPERS

PERINI-SAN FRANCISCO ASSOCIATES

ARCHITECTS

WURSTER, BERNARDI & EMMONS

DE MARS & REAY

This scheme contains 5 tower apartments of 22 stories each, and 3 slab buildings almost equal in height. Housing units total 2174. Maisonettes are planned over the roofs of garage structures. Park and recreational facilities are provided, as well as elevated garages and auxiliary surface parking. A public garage and office building are included in the proposal.

Agreement is unanimous that this proposal is exceptionally successful. The plan is remarkably sensitive with an intimate, yet urban, character. The basic concept of combining high rise and low rise structures is convincingly presented. This proposal further succeeds in establishing a prototype solution for high density residential development of gridiron blocks, within the context of the city's general pattern. This has special significance for future growth.

Elevating the pedestrian onto plazas which form the roofs of the garages, and which are connected together with bridges over the streets, is excellently conceived. This complete separation of people and vehicular traffic is fundamental to the life of the area. While achieving this separation, the automobile has not simply been buried, but has been granted its claim to streets of valuable access.

The scale of the buildings is good. The tower and slab apartment buildings, and the office building, are well composed with the nearby Financial District and Customs House. Buildings have been effectively moved back from the elevated freeway. This general separation from the inherent acoustical problems, glare, and motion of the freeway could have been further enhanced if the large surface parking lot were developed as a greenbelt or park. The handsome central park, with its focal position and ease of access by bridges, is excellent. The maisonettes are considered well related to the towers except that they are too numerous and perhaps should appear more anonymous. They also appear quite expensive.

The tower apartments and slab structures are not considered very well studied individually. Their color is rather garish and the balconies impractical. This is also true of the proposed office building. However, there is convincing reason to believe this would be resolved by further study. The suggestion has been made that other talented architects could well be employed to give these buildings more individual character and elegance of their own.

This proposal has generated great enthusiasm. The competence evidenced by its authors gives assurance of their ability to carry through to actual completion the eloquent concept they have presented. The pattern of relationships between buildings would be a fine extension of the city; and the warmth, intimate character and variety of form and space promise a delightful human environment.

And Skidmore afterwards also submitted a proposal. They had their own developer. (When it came to the point of submitting it, it seems to me that they lost sight of their own rules--not that they broke the rules. We followed their rules quite literally, because we thought they were very logical.)

One of the things that they called for in it was if more than 40 percent of the land area is covered by buildings, there may be no residences, no living quarters, lower than twenty feet above the street level. I think that's the way it was stated. In other words, if you're going to cover more than this rather small amount of the block, then you'd have to do something other than apartments in those first couple of stories.

We decided this is an urban center, and typically in San Francisco the entire block is practically covered in the downtown area. We would cover the entire block, and we would use that first twenty feet for garages, shops, shopping center, movie--all sorts of things--which is what we did.

We also kept the streets going through, because we thought this is the typical grid of San Francisco. It really knits this into the area. The streets are there. Many of the other projects simply wiped all the streets out and started all over again, as though they had a little island out in the bay, you see. Skidmore, so help me, did exactly that sort of thing. It's as though: let's erase what's there.

Skidmore hired a very bright young man to be the designing project architect, Charles Perry, an architect and also a sculptor.¹ He did a scheme which was beautiful, and when we saw it we thought, "Boy, we're sunk, because this really is marvelous." There were sort of Corbusier things--one great slab building that curved. The site was made kind of rolling. He had underground garages, and they were all covered with dirt, and landscaped, of course. This is what most of them did: they simply buried the garage, then they had lots of park, and then big Corbusier-type buildings around. [gesturing]

Warnecke was one of the architects, and so were Anshen & Allen, and we rather admired what they did. They kept below this

¹ He later did a three-dimensional, mathematical "construct" about four feet in diameter for the plaza area of what was then the Alcoa Building in the Golden Gateway, and the similar piece at giant scale for the fountain in the atrium of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, a part of the whole "Gateway" development.

building area coverage thing, even though they had some low-rise as well as high-rise buildings. It was kind of a mixture with not too much of a pattern into it.

Riess: You were the only ones who retained the streets?

DeMars: I couldn't say that we were the only one, but I think the only that, maybe, retained all the streets in that way, and took the block lines and built right out to the block line.

Riess: In the judging, was that said to be an attractive factor?

DeMars: Well, I have a thing [looking through his papers] which is the--

Riess: Was it all San Francisco-based architects? For instance, did Portman compete for that part of it?

DeMars: No, I don't think Portman was in it at this time. In fact, I don't know that Portman has done any housing, has he? This was specifically housing, you see, although part of the redevelopment area was the area that Portman later developed--that is, the Embarcadero Center. That was to be included schematically in all of the proposals.

We showed, in a bulk sort of way, the geometry of how we would do it. We carried over the idea of a kind of podium. In other words, for twenty feet above the street we covered the entire block in each case. That then became part of the redevelopment requirements that became part of the law, so when Portman took those properties on he found commercial and service uses for all that cubage in a very imaginative manner. Then the office towers rise out of the first few floors, much as our residential towers do across Washington Street.

On our side, of course, there are going to be high-rise buildings also, twenty and twenty-two stories coming up out of the podium. They're going to look down on the garage roof, which would have to be landscaped, and that's quite a maintenance. Why not put houses on top? So we have a whole village of townhouses on the top of the garage base. Although there are walkways, fountains and things throughout, the houses have private gardens. Some people say, "But these people above can look down on you." Well, if that bothers you, don't live there. [laughs] The people who do have the townhouses--you know, you go to the beach, and what are you going to be doing on this patio that you can't be looked down on from? [laughs]

There were to be balconies for every apartment, large or small. That was our scheme, anyway. I think most of the others,

by this time, were doing lots of balconies. But when we did Eastgate Apartments for MIT in Boston, that was one of Wurster's--it was my insistence, also, but at one point--I'm digressing now back to this, but it, I hope, can be picked up.

It wasn't common for high-rise housing to have balconies, because it's a cost, and they're cutting the last dollar. In New York, great big projects, Metropolitan Life and so forth, they would argue that this was cold weather and you couldn't use the balcony and so on. We concluded that there's a lot of nice, warm weather, where the balcony would be nice, so at MIT we decided that we should have balconies on this faculty housing, Eastgate Apartments. At one point, I think Carl Koch wanted to leave some of the balconies out to make a more interesting pattern, and he said not everybody would be interested in balconies. Bill Wurster said, "Look. If they don't want to use it, they don't have to go out on it, but there shall be balconies for every apartment."

In later times, the FHA, in determining the amount of insurance they would give per room, the balconies, which didn't cost as much, were given half a room count, or maybe a quarter of a room in the construction allowance. Suddenly, this was one way to get things to happen; new construction usually had balconies, because they could get another room and count it in the insurance. Anyway, we decided that every one of these apartments would have balconies, and the townhouses would all have private gardens close in. A roofscape is interesting to look at as well as looking down on top of the gardens.

Then, in the middle of the whole property, we took one block and treated it as the typical square that you find in Philadelphia and in San Francisco itself. Union Square, Portsmouth Square--all the squares that are around were one-block size, and so we decided to have a block park in the middle. This was another kind of San Francisco note that we were picking up. All of these were commended.

I have a brochure published by the Redevelopment Agency, which shows who the members of the jury were, and has the scheme shown, and has their reasoning and so forth for it, which I guess could be part of this submission on the Golden Gateway.²

[pause]

Riess: [looking at brochure] Is this surprising to have Lawrence Anderson on the jury? He knew you and Wurster very well.

²See Appendices.

DeMars: Do you think there might be conflicts of interest?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Yes, but the jurors all knew other people, too.

Riess: Yes.

How is it that the "point towers" became yours and the "slab" buildings became Wurster's? I mean, how did you settle on those things?

DeMars: Well, Don Reay and I were the ones that proposed the point towers in the scheme, for the variety and for their slim profile as far as obstructing views from other buildings, as well as the views of the neighbors on Telegraph Hill, etc. In other words, making the development more palatable to the surrounding community.

A couple of the submissions were really from Dullsville. I mean, they just looked like a public housing development someplace in the East, you know.

Riess: Who was the landscape architect who worked with you in that?

DeMars: Sasaki, Walker. They did the park, and it was carried out pretty much as it shows here. Then, of course, there was landscape involved throughout, and every tree that's shown on top of the garages has to be in a great pot. Mostly, where we had a substantial tree, like olives and so forth, they were in a raised pot as well. You might have a seat around it or some such.

Verbal Presentation

Riess: In the presentation, how much is the verbiage important? When you explain what it is that you have in mind, is the articulate statement very important?

DeMars: I think I have an interesting little thing to throw in here. I was elected to make the presentation, and we wrote it out. I may be able to find a copy. We had some joint input on the poetry: "San Francisco is a white city seen from afar, but up close, is many colors"--and so forth. [laughing] It's true. White is made by all the colors, isn't it, in actual nature? You see it from the other side of Golden Gate Bridge and it does look like a great

white city, doesn't it? Except for, maybe, a couple of dark ones like the Bank of America.

Riess: I'm convinced.

DeMars: So that was written.

Anyway, for the presentation before the jury--we weren't allowed to listen to the others--with time for questions, you were given a full hour. You had a half-hour to make your presentation. And a half hour for questions. At twenty-five minutes, they rang a little bell. At thirty minutes, the gavel came down, and that meant you would sit down, if you were in mid-sentence or wherever. We practiced this thing a bit. And all this went on for several days to get through the twelve submissions.

Riess: You wrote it, and you did it?

DeMars: Well, I wrote it, but there was input from everybody as to what we were to say, and so forth, to explain it. I read this off, and it was done with slides, you see. We had examples: "From across the Golden Gate Bridge, the white city..." Then, we have an arcade around--you know the Golden Gateway, don't you? That was suggested. There were a number of places in the city where there were arches. We showed along the Embarcadero, where all the piers have great, great arches there, and so we would introduce that motif from San Francisco.

We had a rehearsal of this. I think it was the night before the jury. Perini was out here with his lawyers, and they were all nervous as the devil. We went through the whole thing. We had done it once before. I think I was keyed in that at one point Don Emmons had got a couple of slides to interject. I guess it was when we were changing the reel on the tray, and we had just shown the model. Then we showed another model, and then I would say, "Oh, could we have that model again?" And Don says, "Okay," and he slides into the tray a couple of naked Chinatown gals [laughing]--artist models, you see? And I said, "Oh! Not that one," or something.

Perini himself was in hysterics. He thought that was just the funniest thing. The lawyers were turning red. Perini wanted to do it at the actual presentation, to lighten the whole thing. No way! [laughing] I think what Don said was--he put this in and said, "Oops!" I said, "Oh! Not that model, the other one," so he slips another one in. You see, there were two of them. [laughing]

In this award statement I've given you, it has the jury's comments on why they chose it, and I think they really got the message that ours looked very San Franciscan.

Riess: And, in part, they got that message because of the verbal sell?

DeMars: Yes, and it's a question of whether what you're saying matches up with what you've done.

I remember--if I can digress for a moment here--a student. Well, it wasn't one of my students, actually. It was a beginning course in architecture, and they were having this presentation. It had to do with a little house design of some sort. He had a description, which he read, of all the things that were desirable, and so forth, which we all agreed were commendable, and then he showed the drawing. He did hardly any of them. He had almost completely ignored them.

Riess: You lent me a book about the Palio in Siena, and it made the point that one's place at the starting gate was so important. I'm wondering, in a competition where there are twelve different entries, as you're talking about here with the Golden Gateway, if your position at the gate, as it were, is very important. Do you know who's going to present first, who's going to present last, morning, afternoon--do these things become very important?

DeMars: I don't know how they decided it, and I think they may have done it by drawing lots, the way they do at the Palio.

Riess: After years of being in the business, do you know that it's better to be the last, for instance, or better to be the first?

DeMars: I don't know that I'd want to be the last. I might want to be the next to the last. I'd prefer not to be the first, certainly, because with twelve, that's a lot of people to remember. Of course, I'm sure they make notes and things, but I think it would help in our case. As I say, some of the projects were really just pedestrian, mostly high-rise--to get high density, you see--just a whole pile of these slab buildings.

Riess: Well, what was your position in this? Do you remember, by any chance?

DeMars: I don't. I could probably find out.

Riess: Do you get a second chance? Do they ask you to come back?

DeMars: No. Then the second part of the hour was questions.

Riess: Then, at the end, when they've looked at all twelve, do they call back three?

DeMars: No. The decision wasn't made right away. It had to go before the Redevelopment Agency as well. Among the things submitted was the price of the land that the developer was offering. In Perini's case, he had offered a million less than one of the others. That was a thing which they had to consider. And they would outline the rentals proposed. There was quite a thing that had to be filled out. It meant, of course, the architectural aspects of it had to be carried far enough that the actual builder can take off the costs.

They had some midnight oil to burn with the estimators and so forth, you see, to cost it out and then to set the rentals. I don't know that those were laid out, but I'm sure that there had to be some of them in a moderate range. I don't know whether they had the provision in this particular case where there would actually be some internal subsidy so a certain number of units were made available for people who couldn't pay the market rents.

Freeway Access

Riess: What was the freeway situation at that point?

DeMars: Well, the freeway was assumed, ultimately, to continue. An issue came up, and I found this, where I was asked to plead the cause. They objected to these ramps here.

Riess: The Washington Street rampway.

DeMars: The Washington and Clay ramps. We made an argument that it was quite necessary--you can see it here [pointing to design]--because, of course, what it does is come down and puts people right in the garage on this side. And the other--you could say they leave the garage and go out on it. Compared with the damage the main freeway has done to values, these really aren't particularly odious. I mean, you're sort of unaware of them. And the view of it--even for the people living here--is a rather graceful kind of thing. It's not all that high.

One of the arguments I had made was: because of the ramps, this piece of land would remain as a park, or at least it would be landscaped. If these ramps were not there, and came down to street level elsewhere, here would be another piece of land which undoubtedly would get built on by someone, because you don't

really need another park a mere block away from the Gateway's square, but any additional landscaped open space is always a plus.

Riess: Did everyone have the same given, that there would have to be a freeway exit, or was that something that you put into your model?

DeMars: I'm trying to think. That's a good question. I don't really know. They may not have, because ours specifically related to the garage that was to be there.

Riess: The area you're talking about, for those people who cannot see your hands, is basically between Davis and Drumm and between Washington and Clay. That constitutes this little park that's under the on and offramps.

[looking at plan] I never knew there were swimming pools.

DeMars: Yes. This was going to be a kind of a health club, which they didn't do, but there is now a big pool there, as well as almost a dozen tennis courts.

Second Phase

DeMars: [looking at plan] I think that [Gateway] project is a kind of prototype for urban housing. It should be high density, and it disappoints me that only two of the towers were built. There would have been five of them, and there would be another slab. The part you pass now where the first three blocks were developed plus the park.

The other three blocks did not go ahead in the first phase of the thing. However, we went clear through the working drawings on the last block, which would have been on Broadway, another of the Wurster buildings, a slab-type building. Completely through the working drawings, and ready to go, and when the figures came in Perini wasn't bidding. The price had gone way up because of escalation. But after all, this was two years later. You'd think a developer would be prepared for this. The cost per square foot now--oh, "This was outrageous, they couldn't stand it," and so forth, and they just backed off proceeding with construction. I don't know if they expected construction costs to come down.

Riess: The first phase had been finished.

DeMars: I guess it was finished, yes, and the park developed, and so on, and they were ready to move into this. I understand there was a

lot of dissension among the actual investors, and so forth, and I'm inclined to blame one of the Perini sons, who was sort of put in charge of it, who was even less interested in the whole thing than Perini himself. He was interested in the bottom line, period.

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Riess: You're explaining what they were really interested in was--

DeMars: Well, the bottom line, and owning the baseball team, and so forth.

Then, about two or three months later, they may have taken another look at it, and costs had gone up again, and I remember them saying to us, "Why didn't you architects make us go ahead after the first phase?" Well, architects don't usually make owners and builders go ahead with something that they don't want to go ahead with. It really is too bad.

The other thing about it, too, is that these would be the last high-rise buildings permitted in reinforced concrete construction in San Francisco. All buildings now over so many stories--I don't recall what it is--have to be steel frame. We went up as much as twenty-two stories. Of course, we had one of the best engineering firms in the city, H.J. Brunnier and Associates, Structural Engineers.

The pity of it is that they could stand this additional high density in that area, so close to the middle of town. They've lost a thousand families or something. The people who live in all the high-rise parts of it now like it very much.

Another firm--I remember them as students from Cal--Fischer & Friedman, came up with a proposal. They're very good at all the real estate aspects of housing. When I was teaching my housing courses, we'd go down to see the latest thing they had done in Alameda or wherever, because it would be exactly the kind of thing that I would have done. Very often, I thought the individual architecture was more interesting than what my own office was doing in modest housing. Fischer & Friedman came up with a way to make it fly, the rest of the Golden Gateway, and this is only a few years back. There's been such a gap there, they no longer could have gone through with the original buildings in reinforced concrete, which would have meant they would have cost even more still.

The current thing has been built on the concept of the podium, as still required by the Redevelopment Agency on this project, that is, the twenty-foot height, in which they've carried

the arcade around, which is part of the original scheme. They've bridged from one block to the other, also part of the original requirements, and it's covered with townhouses--much denser than we did on ours, and maybe justifiably, because it makes it charming to walk through.

Points and Slabs, and Townhouses

DeMars: In our part, the first three blocks, there are overtones, as it finally came out, of a little bit of Mykonos--the little narrow streets, you see, and the fact that they're all white.

Well, another thing came into the picture which I think is of interest. The jury's only negative comment on our scheme--we had the slab buildings white, or a light color, and for the point towers we knew that we wanted to get some variety, that's why we did this thing with the balcony placement a little different on each of the five towers. The buildings were different colors, and then the balconies were shown white on the little model, which made it kind of interesting--though I think the jury thought that made it a little too busy. I don't know. We were going to study that some more. We were asked to. Then they asked for more variety in the whole thing, if they could have it somehow.

Well, Bill Wurster rose to the occasion. Whereas on the model the suggestion was more or less the same little townhouses would just repeat on all these blocks, when it got to really start working it out, Wurster said--and you asked me why we did the point towers--"Well, you and Don were the ones that were most interested in pushing that. Suppose your office is in charge of the design decisions on the high-rise, on the so-called point towers, and we'll do the slab buildings. Then you can do the townhouses on your block, and we'll do the ones on our block. That will make the coordination easier."

Riess: Was Wurster so bossy? The reason I say that is because your voice, when you're being Bill Wurster, is very bossy.

DeMars: Well, he is kind of bossy, but he's bossy about things where he knows he's right. Usually you're agreeing with him, you see, and it's usually a generous--he's bossy about things where he's giving up something.

We were having a little hard time on the first two blocks. When we got some of the townhouses grouped near the big apartments there was a wide space left over, and we were having a hard time

to either get a deep-enough townhouse or a deep-enough garden, or something. They proposed we get some other architects in it. I don't know, maybe it was Bill's idea, but we thought we'd invite one of the people who had been runners-up in the competition. This was Anshen & Allen, whose scheme we had rather admired. We said, "Suppose you do the townhouses on this section." Those are the ones that are along Washington Street.

Riess: You come in on Washington, yes.

DeMars: You come in on Washington. Well, do you notice that those are a little different looking?

Riess: I don't remember.

DeMars: What happened--and we were rather annoyed by it at first--instead of doing a series of row houses, which we had done, because of this depth they did a kind of a Casbah. In other words, they went deep into little courts, and a rather more expensive thing.

We had proposed a barrel-vaulted roof on the townhouses, which had a kind of an interesting look to it. But that has some slight technical problems of roofing it and so forth, and we decided that we would go to a pitched roof instead. Then you could shingle it and whatever. I think Anshen & Allen were going to do the barrel-vault, but they came up with a different roof, which didn't match ours. At first we were annoyed that they were sort of abandoning the thing we had set up as the way these townhouses were done, and we suddenly came to our senses and said, "Well, we wanted variety, and they're giving it to us." I'm very happy with what they did. They're also painted white, so that that's the unifying element in it.

Then when that last apartment was to be done--the third one that I mentioned already, that came in too high--to get some variety on that one we retained Warnecke, whose scheme we had liked also, to see if their office could come up with a different treatment of the balconies and the facades. We couldn't change the planning of both for cost problems. Also by this time I think--maybe not--we could have still done the concrete construction, but Perini couldn't have stood the cost thing.

Warnecke's office made some studies, and put some time in it, and had several variations. They had a meeting one day, and when Perini priced them out, everything they did, all the variations cost quite a bit more than what we had already done. That is, what Wurster's office had done. And so that just dropped that. Perini didn't see the need of any more variety.

Color Scheme

DeMars: Now, the last thing we'll go into: this was Bill Wurster's idea, to get someone to do the actual color schemes for the entire project, the exterior color schemes. Alexander Girard--is that a name known to you?

Riess: No.

DeMars: Well, he was a friend of Saarinen, and particularly of Charles Eames, and the whole group. I wouldn't be surprised--he might have been part of the Cranbrook group, or something. He now lives in Santa Fe.

One of the things he did in San Francisco was the Knoll showroom on Pacific Street, with a very colorful exterior. It had been one of the old honkytonk things from the Barbary Coast. The facade was sculptured by Douglas Tilden, actually, in his early years. Girard painted this in bright colors, the sort of things that Eames would do. They were very much into this kind of circus palette of colors. So Bill Wurster thought, "Let's have Girard just do us the color scheme for the entire project," you see.

The job might have been under construction at this time. We had made models at an eighth of an inch to the foot, so that the high-rise point towers were about three feet high, and the slab building was four feet wide and done in some detail. It had the podiums, the blocks, the townhouses on the top, and everything else. We shipped these all to Girard in Santa Fe. After he worked on it for a while, Don Emmons and I and Betty flew to Santa Fe over New Year's to see what he had done with them. Well, we were shocked a little bit.

Riess: Santa Fe is a different world, colors, everything.

DeMars: Yes, but he knew San Francisco, too. He was familiar with some of the Victorian things that were beginning to happen.

Riess: Seems like such an important thing to give at the last minute to someone else to do.

DeMars: Well, that was my first reaction. I guess we wouldn't have had to accept it, but we thought it was interesting.

I don't know whether we had a meeting with him and talked about it first, but we in working out the scheme we wanted to make

it so that people on Telegraph Hill and in the other apartments could look through between these buildings and that they would be sort of silhouetted against the bay, instead of making a wall. In fact, the people on Telegraph Hill were pretty nervous about the whole thing--the people above that overlook it.

Anyway, he decided to make the point towers very dark and make the slab buildings very light. Then, if you'll notice on the slab buildings, I think they have a rather interesting balcony treatment, in the way there's a little scoop that connects the balconies, a little sculptural thing, [laughing] which you can't see on the tape. He took it, and then, in a kind of Paul Klee manner, with very light colors--yellows, cream, light grey, and others--he sort of blocked out sections, so that behind the white of the balconies which carry across, there's a slight vibration of colors on the whole facade, which almost suggest looking at a hillside in Italy that's been straightened up [gesturing] this way.

We thought that was a rather interesting thing to have done. The only objection I had was in our point towers we had emphasized in the architectural treatment the frame of the columns of the concrete. Even though the walls are solid, those walls are set back a little bit, a few inches, because the columns are thicker anyway. Then, the floor lines we were emphasizing--again, expecting those to be painted a light color and the other infills to come up in another color, maybe darker.

Well, he does the whole thing in--I think he has three colors of blue on one building, and three shades of green in another. He sort of dipped the whole thing into paint, you might say, so it would read as a dark. When I got over the initial shock of it, I decided that maybe that was a greater contribution to the total thing than expressing the framework of the building, and it unified the thing a bit more instead of emphasizing this grillage. Anyway, that's the way it happened.

Control

Riess: As you talk about these things, I can see why I probably never could be an architect. The feeling of control and loss of control! I wonder if one of the parameters of creativity in architects is being able to relinquish control at some point.

DeMars: I've often thought it's not unlike making a movie. There are different kinds of directors, aren't there? There are some who

would be producer, director, act in it, and if it was Charlie Chaplin, do the music. There are others who are manipulating--. The actors are talents of their own. Some directors have written the screenplay from something else, and so on and so on. These different kinds of directors--the good ones have an end product they're shooting at, and all the contributions of these different people are brought into it, while they are cooperating and so forth. If they're not cooperating, they often get rid of them.

I saw a documentary on the making of "Gone with the Wind," which was shown here recently as part of the film festival in San Francisco. Selznick, the son of the one who made it, was here. I couldn't believe that it went through what it did before it got going, and they were all sick and tired of it by the end. Yet, it comes out as a great work of art. The end of it, you'd never know that there was any problem in making "Gone with the Wind." It just happened like the Civil War or something.

Riess: We hear about directors and people walking off the set. I don't hear about that in architecture, and yet you've described a situation where you're asking for someone else's opinion about color, you're saying to two other architects that they might do an element that was originally yours, you're working with five other fully-accredited architects. Wild to think about it.

DeMars: I think we felt--and the jurors and so forth--that the concept was so strong of the whole Golden Gateway.

It was very much as we approached the planning of Diamond Heights--that is, its proposal. I wasn't the architect of anything there, but what I did was set out a framework. Anything they did within that framework would be part of the idea, and you could even, maybe, change the idea if a better idea came, but they didn't. Apparently, they pretty well carried it out at Diamond Heights.

Now, before we leave the Gateway, I've got one other little incident with a personality in it for you. Don Reay was very active in this, did an endless number of beautiful drawings, detailed things of how the park would look, and so forth. Some of the garaging, not on the central block, came out to the sidewalk. Don and I felt that without forced ventilation you had to have half the area open to the outside, and then it'll self-ventilate. We thought we would do this by a grill of vertical elements in concrete.

Wurster had in mind some tilt-up slabs. His office had been using these on many of the Safeways around. (They were doing Safeways for some time, and they had experimented with all kinds

of exposed aggregates and so forth.) They were pushing this. Their firm had four examples. It was pretty much decided it was going to go that way. But since we were part of the architects, Don Reay and I met Bill Wurster and Don Emmons and Theodore Bernardi one day--I don't think Belluschi was in on this at this time--and they had these full-size pieces laid out on the ground.

We met on a Saturday, I think, and walked around. All of us discussed this, and this one, and this other. It was coming down that "Number Three" was the one that Don Reay and I liked, and we said so, but "Number One" was the one that Bill liked. Well, Don and I were really arguing for Number Three when Bill says, "Come on, Vernon! Stop vacillating! Number One is obviously the one to use, isn't it?!" And Don Emmons almost choked up on this. He just laughed. It was obvious that that's the one we were going to use, so Don Reay and I said okay. [laughing]

It wasn't that big a deal. If you're asking us if we were picking it--if it was a suit or a hat that I was going to wear, but you know--Don and I liked another one better than that, but it wasn't that crucial, so we had the Number One exposed aggregate.

Supervision, and Fees

DeMars: I think we can leave Golden Gateway, unless you have a question or two about it.

Riess: On the supervision of the actual work, did you provide supervisors from your office?

DeMars: No. The way we did it--here, again, it was really interesting. Bill Wurster was more than fair about such things, and it was obvious the thing to do was to have the working drawings in his office right there. He had a huge office. He had a hundred draftsmen, I think, at that time. He said that they would do the actual construction drawings, and they would do the specifications.

But as the design went along, we needed representation there, and he proposed that we could pick a couple of people specifically from our office, or hire them from the outside. About two or three other people from his office would be working with them. They would be under our design direction, but they would then be carrying out the working drawings in the idiom of the rest of the office and so forth. We had, I think, about five people who were looking directly to us for design decisions.

Then he worked out the way in which the fees would be determined. First there would be the cost of his office, all the people working from his office on the thing. There's a typical way in which that becomes a cost, usually two and a half times the payroll is one way. (In fact, it's gone up.) Two times is the overhead; running an office and everything else that goes into it as overhead is usually equal to 100 percent. Then the other, the half, is one-fifth of the total price. That is added to it. That becomes the profit.

Then the architects from the office, their time that they spent on it would also be put in. That would add to the costs-- in other words, at so much an hour. We put ours in at so much an hour. If it were just one of the regular jobs in an office, the return that the principals might get would be a certain amount. But this was scaled back a bit, because there was a question of how we shared the final profit, if any. We scaled back the hourly time at a certain price that we were paid for the hours we spent on it, and then finally the amount of hours spent would determine our percentage share of the profit, assuming there would be one to share.

Riess: And was this innovative?

DeMars: Well, it was a kind of a formula. I think Bill just came up with it. Again, those are the kinds of things he would think through. It seemed like a very fair thing. If the principals were spending a lot of time, they would be paid a bit more out of the profit than the others. I think that's the way it worked. I may have gotten a little bit off. I'm going to talk to Don Reay and see how he remembers. It was rather ingenious, and you felt that you were represented. There was no feeling that somebody was getting more than their share, and all of that.

Santa Monica. Unbuilt##

Riess: I see that Ocean Park Towers in Santa Monica is another Perini project. In this case, he asked you to come in?

DeMars: Well, what happened: the Golden Gateway was under construction and the Perini firm was now out here, their presence was here. This one came up, I think it might have been the year after the first competition, and I got a call from one of the Perini people. We had gotten pretty well-acquainted by that time, you see. "You know," he said, "they're doing a thing like the Golden Gateway

down in Santa Monica, another competition. We've talked it over, and we'd like to have you and Don do it, without the Wurster firm this time."

Riess: What was the meaning of that?

DeMars: I don't know that I even said, "Why?" Bill Wurster had some personality arguments with a couple of the people that were running the Perini business out here. He thought they were arrogant and heavy-handed and so on, and there may have been some further dealings, where I wasn't even around to know about it. Well, they had just gotten like the movie directors--producing the film, you know.

I called Bill and said, "They want us to do the thing separately, without your firm. What do you think?" And he said, "Oh, go ahead, of course, do it. The less I have to do with that son-of-a-bitch, the better." [laughing] For a while in there, I was feeling the same way about the main guy, then the ones right below him. (This is not Perini, whom we almost never saw.) His man, the one that first met us, was a swaggering kind of guy, arrogant and so forth. In fact, as we got into this thing he was much more friendly than he seemed to be earlier on, but I could see that Bill wasn't going to take that kind of business, because he was a little high-handed.

Riess: Your Santa Monica design was really handsome, but the Welton Becket office won.

DeMars: Yes. He had a large firm in Los Angeles. He had a little auditorium in his offices. They held the jury meetings and things there. It was very nice of him to donate the space, but we were on his turf. I think Perini didn't make a presence down there. They had a little hole-in-the-wall office in Santa Monica.

The Model

DeMars: Another thing: it was estimated that there were well over a million dollars in architects' fees for the number of the entries for the Golden Gateway. In Santa Monica the agency attempted to simplify the cost to the architects of making their presentation. In the Golden Gateway, I think there were no limitations on models. Some of them were twelve feet square, and large, and took up huge spaces, and so on. In Santa Monica they wanted to make it less of an expense.

The model is usually an expensive thing to do. It very easily can cost five to ten thousand dollars or so. The Santa Monica model was to be made at a hundred feet to the inch, you see, so that the model for this whole area--the number of blocks was about eighteen inches by two feet long, very tiny. In some ways it made it harder, but in other ways--. We made it all right, but it was like making little pieces of jewelry. The buildings were pieces of Lucite, cut out and then spray-painted afterwards. They could be ground and cut into very small pieces. We farmed the pieces out to a couple of students that we knew from school who did very nice work.

Then, when we went to make the presentation, our competitors came in with bigger models. One of them even showed a movie!

Riess: The Welton Becket people?

DeMars: Welton Becket and the other entries. The agency simply ignored that.

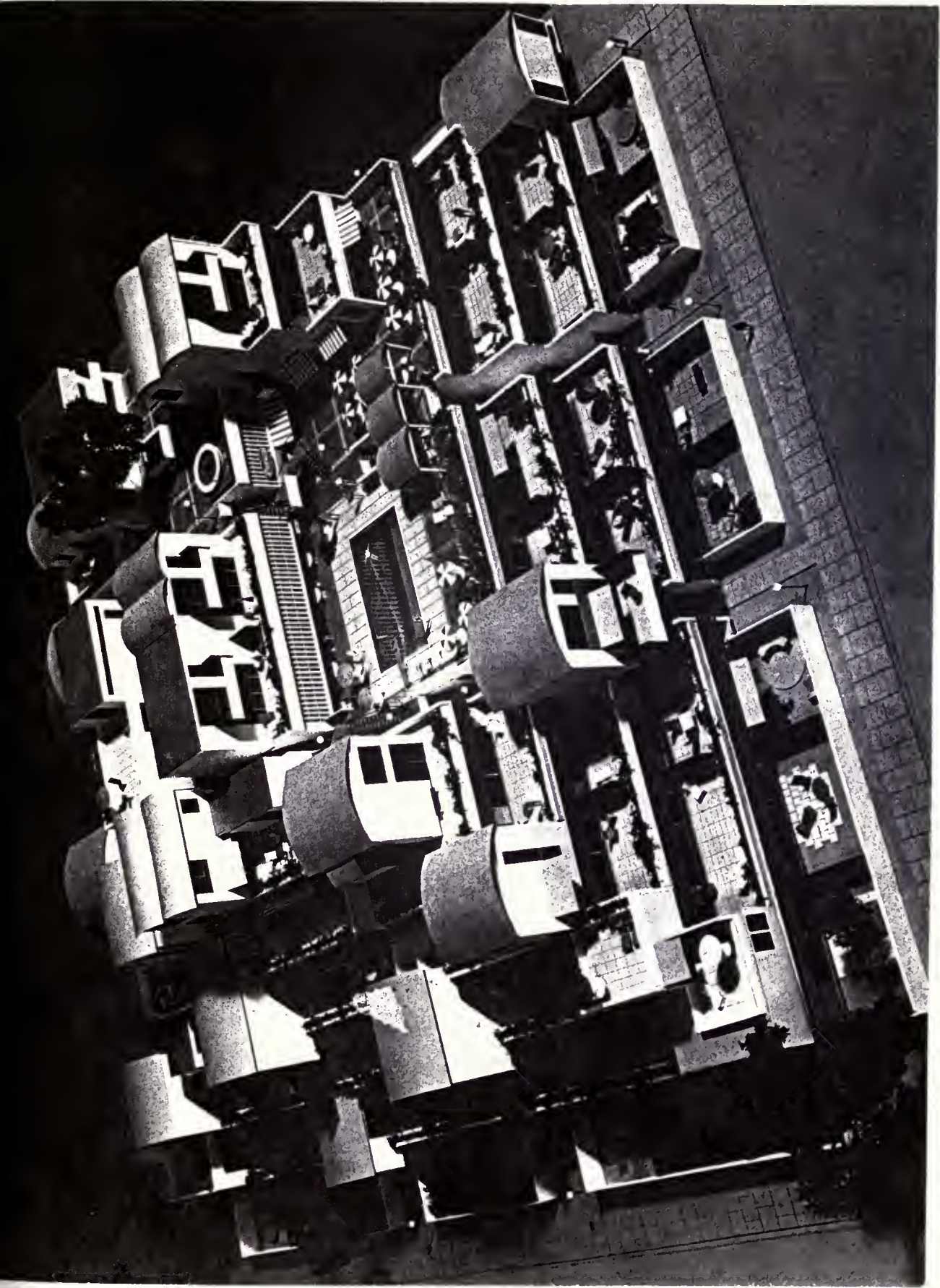
The agency also said that plans, drawings, and renderings were to be in black-and-white. That's why you notice in the book here just the single-line drawings. Well, some of the competitors came in with fully-rendered watercolors and everything else. They accepted it all. In an AIA competition, a digression of any sort and you are simply thrown out, you aren't in the competition anymore.

After we saw that and saw that our little, teeny model might not be understood, we decided we needed to have something to be seen that would explain it better. So we got this other model, which is about as big as that [pointing] table, about three feet square, of just a fragment of the project that would explain the idea at large enough scale, this time one-eighth inch equals one foot.

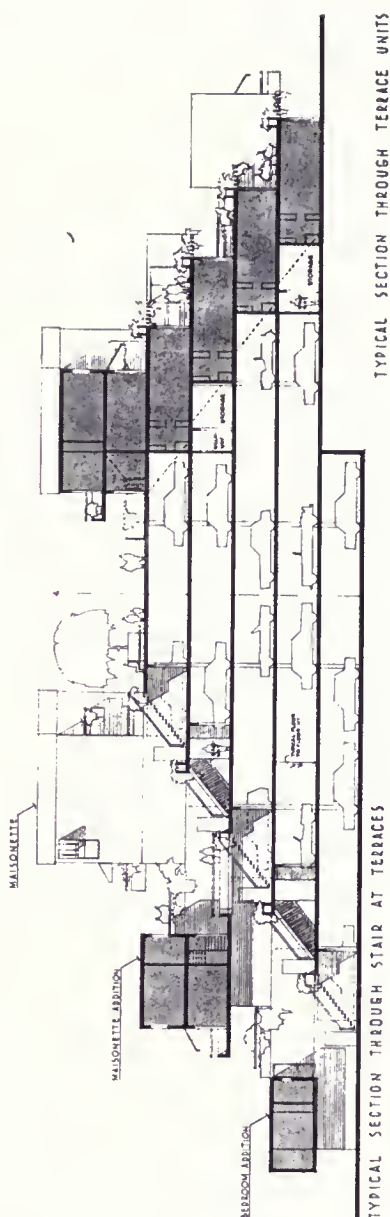
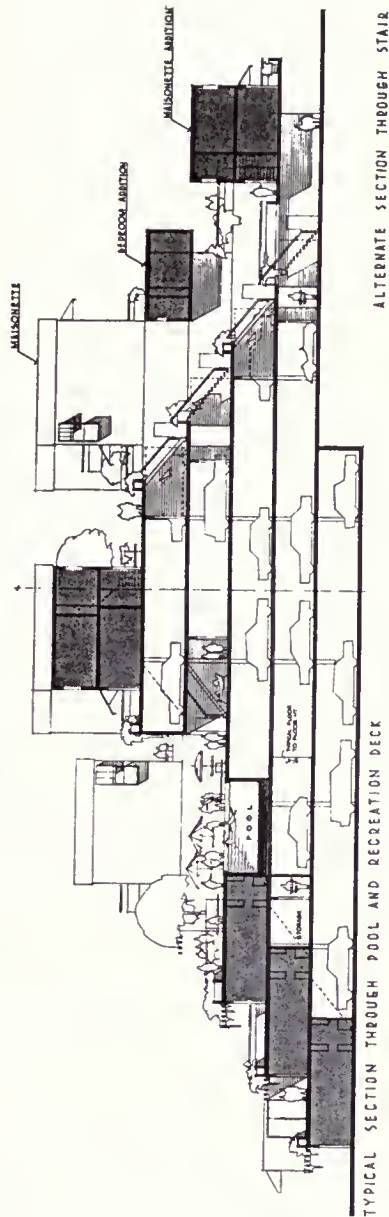
Riess: And who did the model?

DeMars: Someone in our office knew a high school student at Berkeley High, and he came in to work for us. We asked him, "Can you do models?" and he showed us a couple of things he had done, photos of them. We set him to work to do this. We had all the drawings and things, you see.

You know, it's interesting that this has come up right now, because I met him again the other night. He's working for Joe Esherick now, in his office here in San Francisco. This is years later.



Urban Renewal Proposal for Santa Monica, California
Detail of 2000 Unit Development





Riess: Is he an architect now, or is he a model maker?

DeMars: No, he's an architect. He's not only an architect, he went east to Harvard, I think. I think he got a Ph.D. in something very brainy. He's very bright.

Riess: What is his name?

DeMars: Glenn Lym.

Riess: You decided that you had to buck up your entry.

DeMars: That's exactly it.

On this model--just to add a note on the thing--I would have made it with a paper cutter, board and some other things, and then would have stuck the pieces together. Well, he takes the big piece of good illustration board and with a mat knife starts cutting out long slots where the floors will go. I thought, "Now, should I tell him that, really, these might not fit together, because will the floors fit into it and all that? Just the slightest little measurement that's off--it's just not going to go together. Well, we're not paying him very much. Let him find out that's not the way to do it." (I told him this when I saw him just a couple of days ago. He hadn't heard this before.)

So he goes ahead with it. Finally, he's got all of these pieces cut out, so he starts putting them together. And [whistling]. And then [whistling] the next piece goes together. All the pieces fit exactly as they should. They slipped right into the thing--so nice. It's quite a beautiful model that was made.

The Scheme--Garaging

Riess: Well, let's get back to the scheme, then.

DeMars: Well, the scheme is one which both Don Reay and I were familiar with. That is, students sometimes had come up with the idea of stepped-back terraces in an apartment building, usually for a rather steep hillside. But Santa Monica's site is flat. Well, lets make the necessary garages into a hill. Now, the most efficient parking in cost per car is perpendicular parking on each side of a driveway. That takes a width of about sixty feet. But you can set the floors back at thirty-foot steps as you pile them up for five or six stories--and I'll explain this shortly.

There are built examples of terracing back the ends of a slab-like apartment building. It's quite something else to terrace back the sides of a building. I don't know such having been built up to that time. (Habitat in Montreal came later.) The student or other examples referred to earlier were usually very conceptual--not carried out in much detail.

Our proposal had to be studied to the point of working functionally, structurally, and of course legally, that is, codes. The developer had to be able to figure the costs of building it and be prepared to stick by the rents he proposed. The density proposed for Santa Monica was almost identical to the Golden Gateway, about a hundred families to the acre. We thought, again, that it seemed appropriate to do a mixture of high-rise buildings and low-rise, for all the arguments I've given before. Apparently the scheme came through with flying colors on all counts. The Perini people were really very enthusiastic about it.

The site was freer in Santa Monica; we didn't have the designated, measured blocks like San Francisco to work on. It was a large area with a bunch of little windy streets and things, and we really had the whole site, not crossed by any kind of a gridiron or any other street pattern. When we started working around on it, we weren't even constrained to keep the garages piled up into a thing like the Golden Gateway, nor was there anything in the program that said you couldn't have any houses. The coverage wasn't specified.

We were trying to get some large recreation areas and so on. It borders one of the largest beaches there, and a street that cuts it off from the beach. In our scheme, we have a pedestrian bridge that crosses over to the beach. Also, the site is connected to an amusement pier, Ocean Park, from which we got our name, "Ocean Park Towers." We thought this was interesting, to tie that in at one point to make a totality of the whole project.

The lower portions of the garages--we couldn't go much below grade there. It's more costly to go down underground, as it was in the Golden Gateway, because we had the bay right there, and the cost of waterproofing to go down a couple of stories below--well, when you get down below the water level, it gets problematic. We have one level in the Golden Gateway below grade.

In Santa Monica we felt that we should maybe go down a level, but maybe we should just build the garages up. It works out--. One almost has to see a diagram for this. Typically, a garage has a beat. You need that sixty-foot width to get perpendicular parking. Usually when this is done you can have columns thirty feet apart. They don't come down to clear each parking bay

completely, they come sort of halfway in the length of the car. So between where cars park head-on to each other, thirty feet back is not quite to the end of the car. Then, in the next thirty feet is the driveway, and then you have the next one.

Riess: This is impossible stuff to tape and understand.

DeMars: Right. I guess it is. We'll have to include that cross-section view of the model.

The point is, the structure is held up. You don't have to jump sixty feet to support floor slabs and things. You can see it. This is what I'm explaining here. You see, that's thirty feet, thirty, thirty, thirty. What that allows you is, on the next level you can step it back like an Aztec pyramid with little townhouses, and apartments somewhat randomly located on these thirty-foot terraces.

The concept of this is quite adaptable. In one portion, we have a large supermarket in here, instead of garaging. All of that stuff is hidden back behind these terraces. It means that you can park your car at the same level. You go out a door from the inside garage and go outside right to your apartment entrance in just a few steps.

Riess: How many levels of apartments?

DeMars: Well, one, two, three, four, five, six levels. In fact, the maisonettes, which we called them, would be two stories at the top here. So that's really seven.

Riess: And you used the barrel vaulting that you like.

DeMars: We were using that, yes, and we thought we'd find a way to do it by that time. It also meant that on our scheme, these elements could be placed around, as you could see here. All the regular apartments that come off the stairs--you'll notice the stairway separating each pair of apartments going from the top of the pyramid to the ground level. (I don't think the readers will notice it. [laughter])

Spinoffs--Mauna Kea, and Habitat

DeMars: A young man who was working for us at the time, while we were doing the competition, later went and worked for Skidmore. When

they got the job to do the Mauna Kea--do you know it? Have you been there?

Riess: No. I have not been there, no.

DeMars: Well, the main part of Mauna Kea is exactly this scheme, and he worked on it. They have the trellis, and they have the plant boxes, which keep you from seeing into the apartment terrace on the floor below. What happens at the top of the pile--at each level there's a large sort of gallery thing that opens out. There are some courts and things.

Riess: That is in Mauna Kea?

DeMars: That's in Mauna Kea. Betty and I stayed there a couple of days on a vacation trip a few years later. We were able to test out how it would be, and it really is pretty nice. [laughing]

Riess: What about [Moshe] Safdie's Habitat in Montreal. This looks a lot like it.

DeMars: I visited Habitat during the fair [Montreal Expo] and was much impressed, although I could see why there are many things about it that made it very costly as an actuality--the pre-casting and the way these were set around. You can do it on a model, but if you start making these out of concrete, that's rather heavy.

The garage made of concrete and so forth, one of our arguments on this was the fact that in San Francisco there already are these hillside step-down apartments that they have up on Twin Peaks and off Beach Street at the end of Columbus Avenue. These were really the prototypes for this. As long as the construction doesn't get over three stories above the ground at any point, you can build it in light frame construction. In other words, it could be light steel, plasterboard, and so forth, almost wood frame, as long as you don't go over three stories.

So by tilting the garage this way, we would never be more than three stories over the fireproof garage structure below, and that would be considered a hillside. Since we didn't get the job, we weren't able to pursue this with the state authorities, but we think that we could have had double doors into the garaging, and for access and safety purposes we think it could be legitimately considered a hillside.

In Safdie's case, he doesn't go into that at all. They're just all made of pre-cast-on-the-ground elements, and they are lifted up by a crane. They set on top of each other in all kinds of ways, and sometimes the wall above [gesturing] would be resting

here. Well, the pressure of this thing meant they had to have a special design of concrete column underneath that piece of wall or whatever. Also he sort of scoops out underneath. They not only step up on the outside, but you walk up, and there's a great void space as they step up overhead, thrilling in an exposition, but that's where we had the garages, you see. Still, the living could be similar and interesting. You could argue that for an exposition it was worth whatever it cost extra. It was popular as a thing to visit.

A couple of years after that, Safdie had an exhibition in San Francisco at the Museum of Modern Art. I was invited to a little dinner beforehand. I was on the board of the museum. I was, in fact, their sort of resident architect on the board, so it was appropriate to have me at this dinner. He smiled when he met me, and we chatted for a few moments. "You know," he said, "I visited you on my student trip"--this was some years back, several years before Habitat. "You weren't there at the time, and I'm sorry to have missed you. As you might guess, I saw that model of--Santa Monica, isn't it?--in your front office," and he smiled. That's all he said about it. [laughing]

I've already mentioned that every so often students come up with this concept. We were familiar with that, too, but it had never been carried out.

Riess: Students come up with this concept of stepping?

DeMars: A step-back, kind of piled-up architecture of this sort, either on a hillside or on an actual structure. They would find other things to do underneath it, maybe. In fact, I don't know of any of them where it had ever been carried far enough to then see what it would cost, and then carried out, and then say that it was feasible. In this case, Perini actually had to go through this, and they were very enthusiastic about it--that is, the people in their office who had been working on the scheme.

Riess: Well, you said that it came in second.

DeMars: That was the impression we got. Finally, I think that it just was too far out for the agency and so forth.

Riess: It sounded like you were saying that Welton Becket was too far in.

DeMars: Well, both of those. I don't know which. The other was more--I don't know whether Perini really backed it strongly enough.

Riess: How could that happen?

DeMars: They didn't make a very strong presence. They had a small real estate office with the model and a real estate lady in attendance. Becket was right there, the presence was right there, the big office on Santa Monica Boulevard, staff, p.r., and all turned to full volume. By contrast, maybe they didn't think that Perini was that interested or some such thing.

This [producing brochure] was a brochure that was put out with more of Don Reay's drawings. It makes it a little bit more easy to understand.

Riess: It looks like we could xerox parts of it.

DeMars: I don't think Becket's was published in any American architectural journals. The next thing we knew was--[producing journal] here's Baumeister, the German magazine, which gave it a full story. [leafing through journal] Here was the little model of the whole thing and much of the plans. L'architecture d'aujourd'hui, the French magazine, also did the thing. So that's about the end of it, I guess.

Marin City

Riess: On to Marin City. The big issue was the racial problem?

DeMars: Well, they were hoping to have this become one in which it would be a mixture of fifty-fifty. It was soon after the war, and those who were more enterprising, and who could, left the thing because this was war housing and never intended to last this long--the original housing that was there--ingenious as it was. But it was still occupied by quite a large number of people who had no better choice. They were the ones that were to have first consideration on what was to be done with permanent homes.

I should add that there were also those, both black and white, who really appreciated the location and the site, with some of the most magnificent views in the area.

Riess: What was the agency in this case?

DeMars: This would be the Marin County Redevelopment Agency. I have written stuff someplace that I'll have you take a look at sometime--pull it together--which perhaps gives more of the details of the actual project. It was hoped that houses could be built on long-term loans and so forth. Again, these were initially for families that had children. There would be a few

apartments and so on. Of course, our thought was to try to have the whole range of income levels.

Riess: Once again, it's high-rise, mid-rise, low-rise.

DeMars: Yes, but in addition the topography and the additional cost of building on the steeper slopes up above would dictate. That's the usual way it goes--that those are going to cost more. However, it wouldn't be segregated in the usual way, in which the rich people never come in contact with the others or whatever. In fact, on the lower levels there's already this public housing development which Frank Lloyd Wright and Aaron Green had done on the south end of the bowl.

[added in editing] This subject was dropped rather abruptly. Let me try to round it up with my usual brevity!

The site, right next to Sausalito, is a kind of basin with slopes rising rather steeply on three sides, and an arm of the bay to the east on the fourth side. Nearly all the housing was to be on the slopes, and the large flat area at the bottom would hold the existing elementary school, a new high school planned for the area, play fields, and a first-rate shopping and business center with stores, offices, churches, etc. Even a pedestrian crossover of the main flanking highway to a little yacht harbor on the bay.

Well, the project for all this won us not only the selection for our client, Jim Scheuer as developer, us as architects, but even the permission to significantly raise the density to make it all possible. Don Reay's sketches and our models made our mixture of dwelling types, activities, social, racial and income levels all seem very real and altogether desirable.

When published by Progressive Architecture in January 1960 it brought us the First Honor Award in their yearly competition for projects big or small but not yet built. This was from a field of six hundred entries nationwide. Don and I went to New York to receive the award and it was pointed out on the occasion that this was the first time a firm had received a first award for three years in a row. (The other awards were for Sacramento's Capitol Towers in 1959 and Berkeley's UC Student Center in 1958.)

To summarize what has happened since: after delays of a year or more for community review and input, zoning, planning and financing problems, over a hundred houses were built to our plans on the lower slopes, then some fifty a bit more spacious, and expensive, higher up. To attack the cost of concrete foundations on steep hillsides, all the single family houses used a structure of chemically "preserved" telephone poles sunk into holes in the

hillside and exposed externally up to the house eaves. A number of walkup apartments and two townhouse groups were done among the first house lots.

Farther up the slopes other architects did some custom houses among ours, a situation we had planned for. Finally, at the crest of the hill, an apartment complex was built, but not our cluster of point towers which we thought would make an attractive landmark for the community. The high school never materialized, nor did the shopping center we had imagined and hoped for in what remains a prime location. The reasons continue to be economic, and racial, sorry to say.

XVI THE BIG NAMES IN ARCHITECTURE, AND THE UNIVERSITY SETTING

[Interview 12: 20 April 1989]###

Tom Wolfe's "Compound" and the "Eccentrics"

Riess: In From Bauhaus to Our House Tom Wolfe says that with the arrival of Gropius at Harvard in 1937 architecture had moved to the universities, the "compound." And he classified men like Saarinen and Wright as "eccentrics." The universities that he refers to are eastern--Harvard and Yale and Princeton. I'm wondering, as you all sat out here, what that meant for western architects or for the University of California's Department of Architecture?

DeMars: Well, a lot of the eastern architects did a lot of writing. It still goes on. All the magazines are located there. They're on close personal terms, I'd say. It still goes on to some extent. Venturi, for instance, has written several things. I have never been much of an admirer of his architecture. It seems kind of simplistic. You wonder, "Well, what's this all about?" You see, it's very subtle, and he's kind of a Warhol of architects. He'll use giant lettering--

Riess: Supergraphics? .

DeMars: Well, not so much supergraphics--not done artistically. Crudely done, almost purposefully, in a way. One of his early designs, some sort of a senior center, the building looks highly undistinguished, and it has this oversized lettering on the sign, almost as though he had gotten the students together to paint these big letters. Guild House, isn't it?

Riess: Yes, that's right. In Philadelphia.

DeMars: A lot of the supergraphics--for instance, Barbara Stauffacher's use of Helvetica, a finely-crafted letterface which looks really splendid at any scale--there's an aesthetic there that goes along

with modern advertising that's calculated to be pleasantly patterned and so forth. This other--he avoids doing it.

Riess: Venturi is a second generation of these people, though, isn't he? Was there any International Style thinking going on out here in the University?

DeMars: I think you could almost say no. In fact, in a way, Telesis was a kind of a counter to--what do you call this? the "compound"?--counter to the International Style. We didn't know whether we bought the International Style yet, "hook, line, and sinker," or not. Most of us had been to Europe and seen what happened, and we were not persuaded to try to get on the bandwagon as such. The influences out here, the climatic conditions and so many of the problems, we thought we had our own solutions. Wurster and Dailey were the torchbearers for the notion of getting rid of imitations of classic forms and using what modern discoveries had made possible, but not to the exclusion of building things out of wood.

Riess: When someone like Mendelsohn would lecture, what was the fallout for the architecture department?

DeMars: Several times Bill Wurster purposely has put together people with opposing views and opinions of things, feeling that the students should see all sides of these things. Even though he wouldn't do the Mendelsohnian type of thing himself, he admired the man for his accomplishments, and he apparently was available. Again, as you say, here's someone that the students could see: "Well, here's a very important man who's had a good deal to do with the modern movement." In the East, people were writing, theorizing and so forth, too.

Riess: The manifesto.

DeMars: Yes, and Wolfe talks about it in The Painted Word where he is suggesting that all art takes place between Thirty-fourth Street and somewhere else--I've forgotten exactly what he says--and the rest of the world doesn't really matter. The galleries and everything else are waiting breathlessly for the next breakthrough.

Riess: Did architects out here come up with a manifesto equivalent in impact, saying, "We don't need all that"?

DeMars: I guess that's what Telesis did, partially.

Riess: I'm talking about after Telesis. Tom Wolfe is talking about after Telesis when he's talking about Venturi, and then Stern, Graves, and all of these people.

DeMars: Well, our manifesto was the Telesis show. This was showing what the rest of the world was doing: this is what they do because that's the way they see it. But it shows that their thinking is really way ahead of us out here, and we at least can catch up with the thing by taking our own conditions, our own problems, and finding solutions for them. And we did use examples of International Style that we particularly admired, such as Breuer and Roth's Doldertal Flats in Zurich.

Riess: You also might say that the manifesto was the creation of the College of Environmental Design.

DeMars: Yes, partially. That, in a sense, almost came out of Telesis. So you're meaning postwar, then.

Charles Moore has done a good deal of writing, and he had done very little building when we brought him on the campus here. Still, he was known about the country. He wrote rather easily. I remember telling Wurster that Moore seemed to be able to dash off these letters. Everybody wanted to come and teach in Berkeley, you see, hearing that we were hiring and so forth. It would take me a week between one thing or another to get that particular letter out, and I thought it had to be worded carefully. Moore would dash these things off. That's what led me to suggest to Bill Wurster that he would make a good new chairman, he could handle this.

I think Moore has a Ph.D. in architectural history. I'm pretty sure. He was really a theoretician and quite knowledgeable about the whole modern movement, but also very knowledgeable about architectural history. He really is an enlightened character, and I had often hoped that someone would give him a city hall to do--something where he wouldn't be making "in" jokes for his friends and so forth, who could recognize what his irony or his allusions were in any particular case. A lot of his work was of that sort. It had a kind of inside architectural cleverness.

For instance, his Santa Cruz College, done in rather cheap materials and not at a great deal of, you might say, essential expense--you could probably tear some of these things off if the mood changes. I like the idea of doing a little street, but it's a little artificial. I haven't actually seen it, but I could see what he was driving at immediately.

The thing he did in New Orleans, the Place d'Italie, isn't it? I remember, just about the time that came out, I was on some kind of an architectural jury--I think in Sacramento--and at the awards dinner I praised that as being a kind of breakthrough, in

that purism is out now, and this served the purpose of breaking the ice. I thought it was really great. It wasn't that serious a thing. It would be interesting to people and so forth.

Gee, I almost got boos from this audience! The architects who were there had seen it also, and most of them thought it was just absolutely outrageous. It is a little outrageous, but not without all sorts of overtones--aesthetic and otherwise. I'm sad to hear that it hasn't been as successful as it somehow should have been.

Riess: The idea of the architects in the audience booing--that's something that comes up in Tom Wolfe's book, architects gathering themselves up to hiss at certain new things. Are architects, as a group, quite reactionary in that way?

DeMars: Well, they can be. Because it does include people very busy with serving the public, with giving them what they want--

Riess: Or what they should want?

DeMars: Well, what they think they want, or what they say they want. I mean, it depends. If they're not very adventurous and can only do certain things, and they're on all the boards and all this--that they know all the codes--there's a personality in there. It would be like the ones in the IPAR study that had never worked for one of the main architects. Remember how they divided into three groups?

Riess: Yes. And since you brought up the IPAR study, if Saarinen is called by Wolfe an eccentric, and Wright is an eccentric, then was the group of creative architects that were in the first group in the study a mixture, do you think, of both eccentrics and insiders?

DeMars: Well, take the group that came to my house for a few drinks after their last session. John Warnecke, Ralph Rapson, and a couple of others. Neutra had been with them but had to get back to L.A. You can see that is a mix of pretty successful but independently quite creative types.

Talking about the eccentrics, Wright did a lot of writing. Very often people who didn't have much work at the given time presented their ideas. Corbusier is the same way. Several of his books and writings were known all over Europe, and he had hardly done more than a few of these little houses, one for Ozenfant, wasn't it? his brother-in-law.

Gurus and Disciples

Riess: In your thirty or so years at the University here, who in the department would be recognized as having made seminal contributions to architecture?

DeMars: Well, I suppose I'd have to start with Moore, until we get a couple of the others in there, because he wrote, he talked about things, he analyzed. Each time he would do something it would--I almost would say it hit the fan. Like, here he does himself a little weekend house in Orinda. It's in all the magazines and everything else, and suddenly it's all right to have pitched roofs now, you see. You wouldn't think one little modest thing like this could have that impact. It breaks the whole barrier.

Then, of course, the Sea Ranch condominium piece there--just immediate. I had the same reaction to it. When I saw it, I said, "That's it." That breaks the eggshell of only certain kinds of purist notions that fit the International Style being acceptable. No one could say that that is derivative. (Well, it's derivative from local influences, from the shape of these hop-kilns, for one thing. Plus the California barn, which has its own character, with the roofs and so forth.)

I'm trying to think of who else out here was writing. I don't think Bill Wurster did that much writing about what he was doing. Did you get that impression? He would speak a bit about it in brief.

Riess: In Moore's case it was both the breakthrough buildings, plus the writing.

DeMars: Yes, and they were quite separate. He didn't do this thing and then write an article about it. I don't think he even talked about the thing itself. He was talking about architecture in general at the time, in these pieces. He would be asked to do an article for one of the magazines or whatever.

Riess: Who is Chris Alexander? He's a writer, isn't he?

DeMars: Yes, a writer. Again, this fits the image. He was initially, I think, a mathematician--not in the image of Christopher Wren, who I think was a genius as a designer. Does that make my point? [laughing] He has a following, and he wants to fit it all in mathematically and in terms that can be solved by others. I guess that's the way the science goes. I mean, your experiment--you tell all the reasons, and someone else can do it, too.

His seminal book is this publication called Pattern Language. Before that, he was well-known internationally. He was in Britain--he was brought over from there. He's--let's see, what did you call the Wrights and the others?

Riess: Eccentric. That's what Wolfe called them, but only eccentric from the view of this university compound.

DeMars: Well, he's eccentric, all right, except he might be considered part of the core for his writings, and then nonproduction or something. I don't know, but he really had a driving personal conviction that he was on the right track. He would talk about all this pattern language, and we'd see these things coming up.

I remember Don Reay saying, "He keeps not reinventing the wheel but rediscovering the wheel," which most of us were doing. Yes, of course, four people sit around a table. It's nicer for breakfast if it's next to a window where you look, and so on. That's Pattern Number 364, maybe, and then people like window seats. Yes, they do. [laughing] I've got one out here myself, and I've noticed this. Maybe it needs that [simple statements of the obvious] to break through from a certain purity kind of thing. I have to admit I don't know the book thoroughly; there's something called "graphic standards" that architects usually have, and I can see that that is not selective quite in the way that his are.

Then he would have his classes not meet at the school, which apparently wasn't convenient for him, but at his house or some other place off campus where he wouldn't be disturbed in pursuing his particular interests. They would build a house together. That's a hands-on kind of thing, very appealing to some students, and quite useful. All students should have that experience at least once. This question is, should the instructor be someone of so little experience himself in actual building? The resulting designs were, well, usually kind of dumb.

Riess: Did his students turn out well? Did his thinking really free them?

DeMars: I'm inclined to think they were like the less talented Frank Lloyd Wright students who found their guru. He could do no wrong, in a sense. But as to whether they were able, then, to do anything on their own--.

Well, Bruce Goff from Texas was one, of course. Wright praised him highly. And he had a set of his own disciples. He was the guru. Recently he's been sort of rediscovered. He

undoubtedly was a talented guy, but really off in left field as far as much of what he's done. For those people who like it, they swear by it. He's most recently done the museum of Japanese art at the Los Angeles County Museum. Do you know it?

Riess: Oh, yes.

DeMars: Do you know it by personal experience?

Riess: Yes, at least in the building stage which it has been in for the last two years. I don't like the looks of it. Strange shapes.

DeMars: Well, that, I think, gives you an idea of what he's likely to do. I would have had a nervous feeling about him. [laughing] I mean, that sort of thing. I can't, really, right at the moment--if I think, later, about some other people who would write out here. We were sort of busy building things.

The Strength of the Department: Wurster's Hand

Riess: If you were talking to prospective architecture students, what would you say was the strength of the Berkeley department?

DeMars: I think the strength now would be that from a rather large faculty, the teachers of design are people who have done a lot of building--and different kinds of building. They bring to it their professional background and experience. Also, different views. This was one of Bill's choices. He put the three of us--Esherick, Olsen and DeMars--together, all sort of going off in different directions, and thinking out of that would come something interesting and dynamic, which I suppose it did.

Riess: Under your chairmanship, did you try to do any particular thing in that three-year period?

DeMars: Well, I think we were still trying to get the school put together, that is, the College of Environmental Design, faculty and certain kinds of things--student participation to a greater extent than during the Beaux Arts period, when juries were held secretly and so on. I brought that back from M.I.T.. It may have started there, where the students sat in and presented their works.

Riess: You were chairman from about 1959 to 1962.

DeMars: That probably reflects the time of the appointment more than actual years. Because I really remember being chairman for only two years.

Riess: You recommended that Moore would be good to take over. Did you bring Moore to Berkeley while you were chairman?

DeMars: Yes. I was giving a lecture in Utah and was picked up at the airport by Roger Bailey, head of the architecture department at the university. Betty went with me on the trip. Driving us from the airport, Bailey said, "I understand that you're still putting together a faculty there at Berkeley. I have a young man here on our staff who I think is very promising. Not that I would want to get rid of him, but I think that you might find him someone you should consider. His name is Charles Moore." So I did, and so that's the way that happened.

Riess: And what did you see in him, right away, that convinced you?

DeMars: I guess I must have been familiar with some of his writing. It sounded like he was knowledgeable about history as well as interpretations of it--which, of course, he's done in his own way. He has really almost led the way in saying, "It's all right to be inspired by things that happened in history when they're relevant to the problem. Obviously there are things--the dress is not a costume ball and we have to find our own versions." These aren't his words, but the idea is that when it's applicable he's not afraid to do it. Like the New Orleans plaza. I can't think of any other contemporary architects who would propose doing that sort of thing and get away with it. Maybe Frank Gehry.

Riess: Gehry did the Los Angeles Olympics in the same spirit, I believe.

DeMars: Yes. And he was on the short list for the new San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Riess: Is Frank Gehry someone who you might invite to lecture?

DeMars: Oh, I think so, yes. I'm not sure that I'm an unqualified admirer of everything he does, but I can see that it has a lot of self-confidence. He did some very modest little things in Ocean Park in which he's reacting very specifically to what already goes on there. It's not meant to be the beginning of an international style, I hope, thank God. I just don't think that's it. It has a sort of junky character so that it goes unnoticed among the junk and other things in Ocean Park.

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DeMars: Wurster had ideas, I guess, about people coming to Berkeley, and it was my job to carry them out. The first was Dick Peters, whom I met in Aspen when the A.I.A. sponsored the first of several weeklong symposiums held in some interesting scenic or exotic spots where promising young graduates from various architectural schools would be brought together for discussions on subjects of interest. These were students who had been picked by their schools for having already demonstrated an interest in teaching, and had some experience as teaching assistants. The program received financial support from the national AIA, and was the brainchild of Harold Bush-Brown, dean of the architectural school at Georgia Tech. I worked with him on organizing the first of these, the one at Aspen, and attended the next one.

The second gathering was the following year in Nantucket where I met Don Lyndon. You see, these were attended by faculty from the various schools on the lookout for promising candidates to their own faculties. So Lyndon came to Berkeley--and he's back here again now, after an academic career of growing importance over the years elsewhere. At one point when we needed to pick a new chairman somehow or other Lyndon wasn't considered chairman material yet. But Oregon thought he was, and he was there for several years as Dean of Art and Architecture, I think. Then Yale wanted him, as did M.I.T. He didn't go to Yale. He went directly to M.I.T., I think it was, from Oregon. And of course he was, and still is, the L of M.L.T.W., Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull & Whittaker, the team from Sea Ranch, the famous condominium there, and many other things.

Riess: What does being department chairman material mean, really?

DeMars: Well, I guess it means that your dean and your colleagues are aware of your ideas about teaching and architecture from personal or group contacts, lectures or writing. Lyndon has done a good deal of writing, articles and such in professional journals. In recent years he's been involved in editing a periodical called Places, with articles on urban design and such. It was started while he was still at M.I.T., and jointly published by M.I.T. and C.E.D. Berkeley.

Sounds as though he could have qualified for chairman at Berkeley, and I don't know why he was passed over earlier. Anyway, I assume he had finally been noticed here because he's back on our faculty now, and with a private practice as well.

Riess: At some schools the chairman is more important than at others.

DeMars: In one sense it's more now here, almost, in some ways, than it was in my time when Bill Wurster was dean.

Riess: Why?

DeMars: Well, a dean is head of a college. A college is a group of departments, even if only two. At that time the college consisted of the undergraduate Department of Architecture, and the Graduate Division of Architecture, which gave the Master's and Ph.D. degrees. The faculty and number of students wasn't much bigger than before. There had to be an architecture department chairman, but Wurster pretty much went on doing his thing, and of course he represented our operation to the University's administration and the Council of Deans, etc. I chaired faculty meetings and invited the Dean, when he had something special to say or report--which was frequent.

If things are going along smoothly, I don't think the chairman is terribly important. There was the budget to do, and there were some projects coming up. Then, there would be juries we'd be on, and you'd be seeing what others were doing, and so forth. Occasionally these were discussed, either in faculty meetings or at other times. Sometimes I had to lead the discussion.

Riess: Would it be automatic that you would want to bring the trendy guy, the one who is being published, to teach?

DeMars: No, I don't think so. Bill admired--we had at M.I.T. several students from Denmark. One of the American students married a Danish girl and he lives in Copenhagen now. There was quite a little connection there. When we came out here, for several years in a row, maybe five years or so, Bill invited a Dane to be on the faculty. Wilhelm Wolert was one. He was one of the architects, if not the main architect, for this museum outside of Copenhagen called Louisiana. Do you know of it?

Riess: I know of it. I haven't been to it.

DeMars: He has quite a practice and quite a reputation there. A couple of others from Denmark were brought over.

I'm trying to think who else. Foreign architects? That was how Chris Alexander came, and I guess that was because of his writings, because I don't think he had built anything yet. He was well-known for being a theorist.

We had quite an exchange program over the years. Several of our faculty have gone to the Royal Academy, Dick Peters and Don Olsen both several times. And there was an exchange program with the Bartlett School of Architecture at the University of London.

Eric Mendelsohn. and "Common Courtesy"

Riess: Would you fill in what you can about Eric Mendelsohn. You have mentioned a story. I know it was much earlier when he was here, but tell us about him.

DeMars: It's just one of these little incident things that are kind of interesting about a man's character. People knew who he was, knew about him, of course, and I think the second or third semester here he was teaching a graduate course, and he had twenty-five signed up. He said, "Twenty-five. Impossible, impossible! I can't handle twenty-five." So Bill Wurster put me in to assist him. I would be an assistant, not a whole separate group, because these students all wanted exposure to him. So we worked it out that lectures and juries and all this--they would participate in all these things.

Now, the kind of project that he would give--did I tell you about that?

Riess: No. That's what I want to hear.

DeMars: To stretch their minds, you see, the kind of thing he himself would do might be the design for a shoe factory. I don't know that it looked like a shoe, necessarily, but some of the things, in a kind of expressionistic manner, you looked at it and said, "Yes, that is a pencil factory," or "That is a--" whatever it was. Of course, he did the Einstein Tower.

Riess: That's the one that looks like the shoe.

DeMars: It does look like a shoe, but that wasn't the one that was a shoe factory. [laughing] It was supposed to show the fluidity of what concrete could be formed into. In actuality, it's made of brick and then chiseled down to that shape because they didn't have the technology for the form work or the time to do it. It has this shape, and it looks like a thing for Einstein, doesn't it? In a way, doesn't it? This form, that the world hasn't quite seen yet.

Riess: Definitely, the world hadn't seen that form, yes.

DeMars: His thought of a way to stretch students' imaginations: give them a difficult project, like a whole city to design, except it's going to be on the moon. It might be made of circles and so forth, you see--domes and so on. My objection to it was that I felt, without any rules set, the students were going to make them

up as they went along and if the thing got to be a problem, you changed the rule or you ignored that particular part of it.

I felt that even though you might say it would stretch their imaginations, at this stage students have been four years in architecture, and in their fifth year they're ready to design real things. My feeling is they're ready to design a complex of real buildings with real problems. That was when I gave them the first inklings of the student center to design, where we could walk out on the campus, see the site, discuss the pros and cons of all the pieces. We made a point of sitting in as much as we could on Mendelsohn's critiques, and we got along fine. He didn't object to this.

Riess: Did you take it up with him?

DeMars: Well, I forget. I can't remember now how I did--that I thought I was equal to the task. I don't quite know how I got around that, but I can remember the first day. We went in the graduate room in the old architecture building--.

When you come in off Hearst Avenue and Euclid and you go up, the first room was the graduate room, just a rather small room looking out on the street. Of course, all the rooms are stepped up the hill. It makes a hierarchy of things. It [Northgate Hall] is a rather small building, but it was organized so you could walk into that building up the hallways, but then the rooms were en suite, one room opened into the other. The grads sometimes closed that door, which meant you had to take another door and go by the hall, or through the library, but typically the younger students would walk through the graduate room to go out. So then they could see what the grads were doing. That was good. It was great for them to be able to see this.

The school was so small. Twenty-five was a large number for the graduate students. I had about eight, and Mendelsohn had twelve or thirteen. The first day they all gathered around a couple of drafting tables to be informal, you see--sitting on their stools. And Mendelsohn starts talking about how to sharpen a pencil. It wasn't before mechanical pencils--there were mechanical pencils--but an architect used a wooden pencil. "You do it like this," and he sharpened one and showed it around. "You should have a sharp penknife," and so on.

Riess: How would you describe the gesture?

DeMars: Well, you hold the pencil in one hand, pointing up, and then with your thumb braced against the side of the pencil, but out of the range of the knife, you whittle it up very carefully. It isn't a

thing of going [gesturing, making a slapping noise] "hack!" like whittling, but you're pulling it up, when you've got it down to the fine point.

So this went on, a kind of a therapeutic little introduction.

Then he had a little lecture. He went right into expressionism in architecture, I think it was, and showed there are different opinions of how it is. He draws on the blackboard a straight line, makes a rectangle above it, so that the other three sides---but the straight line continues. "Here's the ground. This is a building. Mies van der Rohe." He puts a cross on the top. "A church." He rubs it out, and he puts a star of David. "A synagogue." Rubs it out, puts a little sickle there. He says, "A mosque." He didn't think that was expressionism in architecture. The building, its form should give you some feeling of what it is for, what goes on in it.

Then there was a bit of discussion, and I can remember this. A couple of students were getting into it, and one said such-and-such. Another student says to the first student who had spoken up, "No, no, no. That isn't what he said. He said so-and-so." And the other one's saying, "No, he didn't." And Mendelsohn said, "He, he. Who's he?" The student said, "Well, you. You just said it," and he said, "Never refer to the professor as 'he.'" [laughing] It was done in a way which they needed, because that is almost rude, isn't it?

Riess: Was his English difficult?

DeMars: No. It had a bit of a German accent, and he spoke rather rapidly, the way I'm doing it, too. I think he even smiled afterwards, after he said this, so that they didn't take too much offense, but he felt that there were manners. They were graduate students after all.

There was another incident that happened when we went up into the exhibition hall for a critique of the student projects. The students had all gotten there ahead of time. There were a few chairs in there, and then to get more you could go down a half a flight to the little lecture hall where there are sort of caboose chairs, or the barroom kind of chair. (It's not as fancy as the thing at Yale or Harvard. You know, there's a Harvard chair, a kind of round thing with a back on it. I think the name is the barroom or caboose. These must have dated from when the building was done in 1903 or so.) You'd go down, and they were all loose seats, so you could carry them up. Well, they carried up enough for all the students.

Mendelsohn and I walked in, and it was a little bit late. The students were all sitting there, and so we came forward. There was no place for Mendelsohn to sit. While we were getting organized there, I didn't want to tell the students, "Someone go down and get him a chair." So I went down and got one myself, brought it up and gave it to the professor. The students all saw me do this and thought that was nice.

Now, you would think they would say, "Oh, my goodness, you need one, too, Mr. DeMars," or something. But no. So I stood for a while. All the students were sitting. Then the critique started. So I went down and got myself a chair. And I thought, "Isn't that strange? Not that you had to kow-tow, but common courtesy to a visitor?"

Just to bring it up to date--a similar thing two days ago. Don Olsen asked me to be on a mid-semester critique of a very interesting project that his graduate students were doing. Now it has gotten to be that these days when you have critiques they'll bring some wine and bread and cheese, a whole spread. Well, several of the people on the jury were still arriving--and Don had the thing rather tightly organized, so that we'd get through a dozen or more students--but the students had already started in on the wine and cheese. After the first couple of projects I thought maybe a student would come up and say, "Would you like a drink, too?"--just whisper it, you know. But we had gone through two student projects, and I said, "Is the jury permitted to have a little wine or something?" "Sure, sure." They had a little recess, anyway. We went over, but all the wine was gone by this time.

Riess: That is very poor form, yes.

DeMars: Isn't that strange, kind of?

Riess: You need a one-unit course on how to conduct yourself.

DeMars: Well, not to rub this subject in, but yes, there could be a little course, and maybe it should happen before they get to be graduate students.

Next question. [laughing]

Buckminster Fuller

Riess: Okay. Since we're talking about "names," how about Buckminster Fuller? He came on some sort of irregular basis, didn't he?

DeMars: Yes, he'd be invited for a lecture. We hit it off very much. Oh, he's such an enthusiastic, outgoing kind of guy. You think, "Is everybody his close friend like this?" Maybe they are. I had a little group meet over at the house here for a few drinks. Maybe it was before the lecture, or afterwards.

I remember him coming to the school at least two times, maybe three. Someplace in my household here I have a copy of his geodesic world's sphere. It's a projection based--if you divide the world into little different triangles, even though they're separated, you can make the thing roughly round. The land masses are not distorted quite as much as some of the standard projections, they're much closer to their actual shape, and the gaps between take place in the oceans. You can fold it up to get where this connects with the next one. I have that with a nice little inscription on it, appreciating our friendship. I don't know where it is, but I'll look.

Riess: How did the faculty enable the students to get the most out of it? Do you prepare students ahead of time with required readings?

DeMars: You didn't need to with Fuller, because he gives a lecture which starts at eight o'clock and goes on, for those who remain, until maybe one. He's still only halfway into it by about ten-thirty or eleven. If some have a midterm the next day, they leave. But usually about half of them have remained through. Literally, it would go on past midnight. He didn't lose a beat. He would stalk up and down the stage, going into this. It's pretty fascinating.

Riess: After that, for weeks afterwards, are the students' minds turned around?

DeMars: Well, the next thing he would do--he would usually be there for two or three days--the students would build a dome, a group in the class, however it was assigned. It's usually a completely new one--maybe made of corrugated cardboard this time, or the problem will be changed--one that he may not have done yet himself. It'll be all made of short sticks and pieces of wire. The next one will be something else. But he has introduced them to the theory. The question, he would say, is what does this building weigh? Well, it's not a consideration, but it has been when they were flying these domes into Alaska to cover radar enclosures. This was one

of the first uses, where it was the answer to a specific practical problem.

Riess: I should think that kind of exposure would be very liberating for students.

DeMars: Hopefully, they will get over it. There are some that went into the business of building geodesic dome houses. The smaller the dome gets--just a little bigger than an igloo--it doesn't work very well modernized. If you make it as big as kind of a house, how do you divide it into rooms? How do you push rectangular things like beds and bureaus up against this wall? Of course, the people who buy one love it--at least they have to say they do. But if you're going to make it out of two-by-fours and something else, that shape is inherently expensive, because of all these pieces cut for triangular connections. They claim that they were cheap to do. I think maybe the contractor donated his services.

Of course, that isn't the only thing he did. His proposed bathroom was another. As a matter of fact, when I was on the National Housing Agency in New York we had these dealings with the Bureau of Standards, and they had a model there. I must have met him there. I'm sure I met him in Washington. My memory is clicking back on this. It was interesting. Now you can buy fiberglass showers--you've seen these, they're complete. That's just one step further. I don't think they had the technology to do this in plastic at that time, you see. So he was definitely--that's a very practical thing. He had his Dymaxion House.

Riess: It looked sort of like an Airstream trailer?

DeMars: No. That's the automobile.

He did the three-wheeled car, which had a couple of tragedies connected with it. I think one of them got out of control and a guy was killed in it. He only built about three, I think. A three-wheeled car is not exactly dependable for high speed. I guess that would be a conclusion. I don't think it ran with the one wheel in front. I think it ran the other way around. But it was interesting that he was dealing with airstream stuff and so forth.

The house had a mast in the middle. From the mast there were cables that went out, and the whole thing was suspended above the ground, so you could drive your car under it, missing some of the cables that went down to the ground. [laughing] I think there may have been a couple of examples of this tried out. It was big stuff. It was always included in, "What is modern architecture?" "What's the next step?" This was very much in the press and so

on. In an illustrated lecture he would show these things and some other things he had worked with.

One other comment he made: he found that running took less energy than walking--that is, at just a slight run--because he was doing this constantly on the stage. He would run from one side to the other. Of course, he wasn't built as high above the ground as a lot of people [laughing]. An amazing guy.

Paolo Soleri

Riess: I remember that Paolo Soleri came to Berkeley. Quite a while back.

DeMars: Oh, yeah, I remember that. Terribly nice guy. He would certainly qualify as "eccentric" in Tom Wolfe's categories. I would put him along with Goff, that kind of an eccentric. He was a marvelous draftsman, a great imagination. Where drafting and imagination stop and reality began is the part that I think was a blurred zone. He only took into consideration some of the elements that bear on any kind of a problem. He would solve one kind of problem by simply ignoring some other things, which you would have said, "This would be a great idea, except for such-and-such, like gravity!"

For instance, he had a whole village of houses suspended inside of a great dome which kept weather out and so forth. But the fact it kept the sun out would be something that wouldn't appeal to people, I think, even though it made a very beautiful drawing with all these little houses, like things inside of a beehive.

Riess: But Soleri doesn't leave things at the level of a thought problem. He likes to build them.

DeMars: Yes, they've gone ahead. Now, he modifies those--that's where gravity begins coming in. I think that they begin to consider it. He would do a thing with a great mast--again, with cables suspending it. You might say it would be a technology that takes less weight to achieve the end, theoretically. It could be planted in the desert. I'm trying to think of some of the others. There would be things hanging from a bridge. Do you remember the exhibit, with these marvelous drawings?

Riess: Yes, I do. What effect did he have on students?

DeMars: I don't think he collected any disciples from that. There might have been two or three, because this would be a thing that the counterculturists would find must be right, to go down in the desert and get the experience of working with your hands on it.

Riess: Would it be the hippies he would get, if anyone?

DeMars: There were always some students who were ready to say, "This is the new reality." They would find a rationale for it, or they don't even tell you. The secret of this would be kept to themselves.

I think there were a lot of people involved in those student movements. Well, look at Abbie Hoffman. [recently deceased at the time of the interview] I must say, we could stand this kind of influence now and then. He was really an idealist who was not mean. He got his points over by outrageous humor, which did make a certain kind of a point. I think that he was probably a good influence on some of the other activists, to say, "Look. This is not deadly serious, or you're not going to get anywhere with it."

Paul Rudolph

Riess: Did Paul Rudolph lecture?

DeMars: Yes, and a very interesting little anecdote there. Wurster invited him out. He gave a master class here for a week, and they did a couple of little projects.

Then he gave a lecture. There was a kind of open competition for the completion of St. John the Divine in New York, and he had a proposal for this. There was an open competition for it, and he just was finishing it up. In fact, he had the drawings out here with him. So we had a meeting in the smallest room of the old architecture building. It was a place that only held about four tables. He had this on the wall and showed us the drawings and explained it all. There was a little bit of discussion, and Paul Wilson, whom I showed you a picture of with his wife and me at a recent Beaux Arts Ball--what did you say he looked like?

Riess: An elder statesman.

DeMars: Like an elder statesman. Well, he's not so elderly even now, but he was a student then, in about sixty-whatever. [laughing] In the back of the room, in a just slightly audible *sotto voce*--there was a moment of silence--he says, "Well, I guess you can't win them

every time, can you?" [laughing] Not to him [Rudolph]--just a comment, but it was heard. I was there. Later that week--Bill Wurster told us about this afterwards--he [Wurster] walked across campus with Rudolph, and Rudolph said, "I like white buildings," and Wurster said, "I like dark buildings."

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DeMars: I think Wurster had reservations about some of Rudolph's work, but I think he also recognized that here was a free spirit going off in another direction. I welcomed it as breaking the ice again on the kind of sterility of the International Style, which needed breaking through. I had felt that a long time. My student center stuff, you could see partly I was still a slight purist. I felt everything had to function.

Riess: The trellises?

DeMars: Well, that's a decorative element which holds up plants, so it's not as though it's too oddball a kind of decorative element. I suppose that's the way I would have justified it. We even allowed the migrants, when we were doing the farm worker things, a trellis. It was all right, but nailed-on shutters at the windows were not.

Riess: If they hadn't been nailed, they would have been fine.

DeMars: Yes, except we felt that there wasn't any need for them in this part of the world, whereas you could see in parts of the south there was a real need. It was marvelous where they were really used functionally. Puerto Rico--you have whole walls made up of these jalousie things to let a mass of cooling air move through from floor to ceiling. This is what we tried to do in our Farm Security work in Arizona.

The "Necessary Decorative Element"

DeMars: I've almost changed my opinion now. I think things which have been a functional element at one time then became almost a necessary decorative element. I almost forgive the use of it in some interpretations where it's purely decorative. I think some of the current contemporary architects are trying to not just literally reproduce things from the past, but at a glance you can see what it's driving at. It has some of that spirit.

I think an example would be during the Spanish period of residential architecture. In Santa Barbara there are beautiful examples of this. These were mostly wood-frame buildings, stuccoed. They were supposed to look as though they were made of adobe, but so as not to have a wall that was two feet thick or even three, at the entrance it might be three feet thick, you see, and you could have a toilet on one side and a cloakroom on the other, inside that hollow, but the entry door would be set back in the recess on the outside. Usually bookshelves in the room would fill out to make a deep window reveal, and things of this sort.

At that time I thought, "That is absolutely terrible. It's pretending to be totally something else than what it is," and that was absolutely verboden. I included the San Francisco City Hall among those things. Here's the form which is really inspired by the Invalides in Paris--or even St. Paul's, that shape of dome. By the time it got to France it still had to be built out of stone, and you didn't have a steel frame inside of it. All the elements around the base of the dome--the extra colonnade, to make a lot of weight there, so that the thrust of the dome thrusts against that, you see--.

Well, now I think the City Hall in San Francisco is probably the most beautiful example anywhere of the Beaux Arts. A couple of other people said this. In fact, I think it's much more beautiful than the Invalides, and you can see that that's what it's derived from. There are so many details, and yet each one has been transformed. But there's no structural need for that colonnade around the base of the dome. The steel framework takes all the thrust. But visually the eye, or the memory, requires it.

Well, we'll never build another one to do that, and if we did I guess we'd be wrong, but I no longer condemn it for looking so beautiful. I may have mentioned this already, but it's the same thing that happened in the Parthenon, which John Galen Howard declared in his history course to be "the world's most beautiful building." At the time, having been born again as a modernist out of the Beaux Arts training of a year or two, I said, "How can he make such a statement?"

Now, having experienced it, I'm inclined to agree. Yet every detail of the Parthenon's decorative elements, the Doric Order, is an almost literal reproduction in stone of a building originally made of wood! You can see the beam ends, the triglyphs, and the wooden pegs which held it all together, the guttae. Look up at the cornice of California Hall here and several other of Howard's campus buildings and you will see this fantastic survival of a decorative element.

Riess: Well, that's interesting--that process of changing and accepting.

Visiting Faculty Status: Ambiguous

Riess: How did you bring a very productive working firm like Skidmore, Owings, Merrill onto campus and make them part of the student experience?

DeMars: Well, let's see. At various times we had them as visiting professors, and I think they might be brought over for a lecture. I don't remember Nat Owings coming over, but I think people working for him might, who would maybe have aspirations to teach here as well, and so they could come and give a lecture. If they were high enough on the hierarchy that they could be allowed to have a week off, or something like that, they might come and have a class.

There were other firms in town, of a smaller scale, where the head would come sometimes for a semester, still carrying on their practice.

I can remember Wurster drumming this into us at faculty meetings--. I make it sound as though Wurster was always drumming us about something, but it was done in a kind of a friendly way, unless you were doing something too outrageously stupid. He would just simply state strongly and with conviction that any new person on the faculty would be invited first as a visitor, to see if we wanted to invite him to come and actually teach for a year. All appointments were for a year only. Then the person would leave. It was not that they were being fired. That's all that their contract was for. Then they would consider: was this guy so good that we'd like to consider him for a more permanent faculty?

Riess: Did you lose a lot of people because of that policy?

DeMars: I don't know. I think that still goes on, but I think they let it drift into a kind of indefinite thing. You don't know quite whether you're on trial or not. And instead of them definitely leaving after a year, they go on for a second year.

Then what happens is that pretty soon, after about four years or so, longevity there means then you have to consider them for tenure. That's an embarrassing time. One should know before that whether the person shows that kind of promise. This is Bill Wurster's thesis, and I think there's a lot to it. I've heard from the faculty now that there are, really, some problems. Also

it gets the faculty rather filled up with permanent people and doesn't allow this other thing, which was healthy in Bill's time, because there was quite a turnover.

One of the members of this jury the other day--I hadn't met him before, but his name is Rafael Moneo. He's a very successful Spanish architect from Madrid, I think it is. Talks excellent English. He was very outgoing in the jury, made some of the most significant remarks, I think, and the whole time in a very friendly way. He got along well with the students. He apparently has a successful practice in Spain with some large important projects. Actually, he's been teaching at Harvard and came out here for a few days for this jury and lecture. I don't know how he carries this on for so long at a time with an active practice in Spain. I understand he has a kind of branch office here in the U.S., like Aalto did when he was at M.I.T., and he goes back to Spain at least every month.. Maybe he's only here for a semester. I don't keep up in detail with the faculty now.

Frank Lloyd Wright

Riess: Did Frank Lloyd Wright come and lecture here?

DeMars: Yes, he was invited a year or two before he died, by Bill Wurster.

Riess: He died in 1959.

DeMars: It was when we were in the old building, The Ark. He didn't come and give a lecture, exactly, but he came and sat on a chair in the courtyard. That meant all the students were sitting below him-- at his feet, in a sense.

Riess: A comfortable relationship.

DeMars: Exactly. I think Bill Wurster sat behind him--I don't know at a lower level or not. I don't know whether it was on this occasion that he [Wright] used this expression, but he called Bill "that carpenter architect," at some point. I think Bill would quote that and say, "I'm proud of that statement about me."

When Wright came, I was chairman. I don't remember whether he was here on other business or not, but what happened was, he was going to fly in from Phoenix. It would have been during the time when they were at Taliesin West. He would come by helicopter to Berkeley, and he would like to be able to come as close to the site as possible. He was going to be put up at the Claremont

Hotel. So, he didn't see why the helicopter couldn't take him there. "All they had to do was clear the parking lot." Of course, they were delighted. It was in the papers and all this sort of thing. [chuckles] While he was there--I guess he was here two or three days--he designed a wedding chapel for the Claremont Hotel. It would be over the entranceway, the sketches of it.

Anyway, the afternoon when he was to meet the students--I was living here at the time, and so I guess I must have been at school--I drove over and picked him up. I think there was someone else with me, who then sat in the back seat. Mr. Wright sat in the right-hand side. I don't know what we talked about, but he was pleasant. I think I told him that I had visited Taliesin West, and I jokingly said, "I even had supper with you one night down there." I said I remembered that we had a scallion and a couple of strips of bacon and something else. He laughed at that.

When we got almost to International House, I said, "These are the fraternity houses along here," and I said, "The one on the corner actually had been a residence designed by Greene & Greene, whose work you probably are familiar with." And he looked out the window, sort of leaning forward, and then leaning back. He only took a glance or two. "Yes," he said, "you can see where they got their ideas," followed by silence for a bit. [laughs] I couldn't quite believe it.

Then in the talk, in the courtyard of The Ark, he had some backhand complimentary references to Bill Wurster, like he "really admired Wurster's 'hands on' kind of thing of solving simple problems in his simple way." I don't know if he said just that. Then somebody asked about his criticisms of San Francisco, and of this and of that, and he said, "Well, yes. Sometimes, to make my point, I have maybe overstated the case a bit, but the trouble is, the press doesn't report the little twinkle in my eye that I have on those occasions."

Riess: How cute! Honestly?

DeMars: Yes. Now, I don't know whether he ever had any twinkle in his eye among other occasions, necessarily, but I had a feeling that--there were two or three other things that he talked about on that occasion, when he was sort of mending his fences. He was about to leave the scene. He was ninety, wasn't he, and I think he knew he wouldn't last forever, and maybe he could leave a better taste in some people's mouths.

Riess: He really thought the Greene brothers had been influenced by his work?

DeMars: Well, I think that's what he was implying. He was egotistical, of course. Somewhere he said that he decided at an early age that he had to choose between hypocritical modesty or honest arrogance, and chose the latter.

Ernest Born

DeMars: Just one little note on Ernest Born, who was a marvelous draftsman. He was on our faculty for some time. He was quite a scholar, too. He didn't get many jobs. He had an office on Montgomery Street. He had an assistant who was quite a capable draftsman himself. He had lots of space, and when they had a job, the two of them would do it together, I think. I remember him from his beautiful ads for Georgia marble showing the workers in the quarry, Piranesi kind of thing, ropes and cranes and stuff. And he did lithographs. And he was a marvelous pastel guy.

When we were first working on the freeway problem in San Francisco in 1955, before it was built, his contribution was to do two great four-by-four pastels of the way the park in front of the Ferry Building would look if they curved the freeway out. They're marvelous, the way he treats the sky and everything else.

Riess: That's what people went to him for, his ability as a draftsman?

DeMars: More than that, an artist. But this kind of overwhelmed his interest and abilities as an architect, and practical problem-solver.

Riess: He's known for a couple of houses--his own house and the house in Richmond that he did for Walter Horn. And he worked on the BART stations.

DeMars: I think he actually designed the structure of the tracks. That hexagonal column and the shape of all the elements that support the trains and so forth, that total design was his, I'm pretty sure. Don Emmons was a kind of a supervising architect over all of it. Of course, Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons did several stations. My firm did two of them: El Cerrito Plaza, and El Cerrito Del Norte [chuckles]--the longest-named station in the bunch.

But the incident I was going to tell you about: he was hired, or interviewed, on doing the chapel for the Pacific School of Religion over here. He met with the board, heard their requirements and so forth, and came back to meet them again the

following week with a beautiful rendering of the whole thing--the plan all done and everything else. The board had no further input at all. I would say that it scared the pants off of them! I mean, he had already designed it. He was so eager to get on with it. I'm sure that he would have been susceptible to modifications or whatever, but he didn't get the job.

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DeMars: You see, they hadn't had a chance to nurse it along a little bit, or whatever.

Riess: Part of the process for the client is a certain amount of nursing along?

DeMars: Oh, yes. The question is how far you can convince them that you interpreted their desires and so forth, or explain to them why this idea they have isn't a good one, or if you have weighed the thing, that it doesn't make that much difference. If they want to feel that they've had this input, it's a rather sensible thing to do. All of those are simply little things that an architect really has to do if he wants to get some more jobs.

I've said a successful work of architecture is a resolution of all the conflicting factors in a given situation. The strong ones have more influence than weaker ones. But you're going to have conflicting ones; and you've got to decide which gives way.

Riess: Compromise.

DeMars: Well, compromise has that negative value. You see, really, you're doing this all the way through your design. If you haven't adjusted conflicting things, you really haven't solved the problem. When people use this word "compromise," it's as if the architect has been dragged screaming into doing it. Sometimes that happens.

XVII MILILANI, NEW TOWN, OAHU, 1962: OCEANIC PROPERTIES, CASTLE AND COOKE, DE MARS AND HALPRIN AND LIVINGSTON

Riess: We're talking now about Mililani, New Town.

DeMars: In Oahu, Hawaii. The way this came about is that Al Boeke, an architect who had taught at USC, I think, somehow got connected with Oceanic Properties, which is a subsidiary of Castle & Cooke and of Dole Pineapple. So they're good clients. I don't know all the details of it, but he's the one who had the idea about doing Sea Ranch, and of proposing to the people who did Sea Ranch, putting together Joe Esherick and Lawrence Halprin and Charles Moore. I think they probably all came into the picture about the same time that they got going on it, so this was his stable, shall we say.

That [Sea Ranch] was pretty well built and completed, and what would Oceanic Properties do next? He usually had some theses. This was a thing which would not only be attractive and would be profitable, but it would preserve a piece of the coast of California--that is, the Sea Ranch. Isn't it ten miles long? Something like that. It appeals to the environmental interest, which people were not ignorant of in those times, though some people think that they only discovered the environment, like the wheel, half a dozen years ago.

Here's Oahu, in Hawaii, where they have these great holdings that are plantations on the inside. What's happening to Oahu, it's going to be Santa Monica plus Los Angeles if they keep on doing it. The very things that are attracting people to Hawaii are the beaches and so forth. But if it's going to be built up solidly with hotels and stuff around the island, and with more little housing developments and so forth, you ruin the very thing that had been the attraction in the first place. Of course this is a growing problem everywhere, particularly in our market-oriented economy. But Hawaii is unique, and might still be rescued.

So what could they do? Oceanic Properties could move their pineapple plantations to the big island or another island. They could move their sugar cane operations. They had a large area, right in the middle of the island, and if they could show how there could be a new town there, which would siphon off the builders that are going to clutter up the entire coastline of the island, it would be profitable, and they could give an example of what a living environment could be. Boeke was a marvelous spokesman about all this kind of thing.

Riess: It would be a place that tourists would wish to go?

DeMars: Well, no, it wasn't for tourists, but they could go and see it. No, this was for people to live. There were beaches and mountains not too far from it. I'll have to show you some pictures of this afterwards, but it's almost central on Oahu. They had, I think, four thousand acres, with a main highway that goes up from Pearl Harbor to the makai. These words--. Since the island tilts, once you're over there, you speak of "mauka" and "makai," which is "toward the mountains" or "toward the sea." Running diagonally up the island is something called "eva," and then the big mountain that sticks out is Diamond Head. Those are the directions: mauka, makai, eva, and Diamond Head means that direction.

Riess: Was the environmental idea that the developers would preserve land on the coast that they had emptied of the pineapple plantations?

DeMars: No, they would just take the pressure off tract builders coming and putting pressure on the island for more housing for just ordinary people.

Riess: But they weren't planning on making that an open space.

DeMars: I don't recall this project being aimed in that direction.

Riess: I don't see how it's saving anything then.

DeMars: But it was, because a lot of the coast was still salvageable for some distance back, in certain parts, as you go around past Diamond Head.

Riess: What's to prevent another developer from coming in and developing it?

DeMars: Well, if you saw by this example that it would be possible to develop in the inside part of the island, then the planning commission, which we had to work through, incidentally, could begin to zone areas along the coast for restrictions on development along the actual beach itself. He was thinking of

this as a demonstrating example of what could be done with such areas. If done properly, it would be environmentally sound, interesting, a nice place to live, and it would be responsive to the particular qualities that the island has. We were sold on that. This is about five miles up, mauka, sort of northerly from Pearl Harbor. You can actually see part of this rising up from the middle of Honolulu itself.

Now I have to tell you how we got the job. For a new town he needed a town planner, he needed an architect, and he needed a landscape architect. So, in reverse order, the landscape architect was Larry Halprin, whom he already had there. I think that he thought of us because the student center had been built-- a large group of buildings. I don't think either Esherick, Moore, or the others, at that time, had done a complex of buildings. Also, I had a little reputation for housing and tract development and small communities, and all this sort of thing they were probably familiar with.

Riess: Would they have seen your Santa Monica plan? That would be pretty convincing.

DeMars: Let's see. Was that at that time? Well, we'll check that out.

I had a call, and he came with the president of Castle & Cooke to our office. We took them to lunch at the student center in the Golden Bear and gave them the works there. We were being interviewed, you see. They had gone back to Hawaii. They had also interviewed a couple of other architects, I guess, while they were here. I doubt that they interviewed any other landscape architects.

Lawrence Livingston, Jr. is the city planner that they had interviewed. He was a student at MIT, not in my architecture class, but a student in the city planning department there. After he graduated from there he got a degree in law. He is a very capable guy, and I've seen a lot of him just very recently. He had Warnecke do his house in Sausalito. But we can talk about him later.

Anyway, one day I got a phone call that we should meet with Boeke and, again, the president. We had lunch at one of the old-fashioned restaurants in San Francisco, I think it was Sam's. I walked in, and I saw Halprin. They didn't tell me who else they were considering or even how they were doing it at this first interview, you see. But here was Halprin, and there was Livingston standing there. They had big smiles on their faces as I walked in the door. They said, "Well, I guess we know what we're here for, don't we?" We laughed about it.

Then the clients arrived and we began getting introduced, and they described the project. The next thing was to come over to Hawaii. I don't know whether in these first meetings they told us what it was for or not, but all this Hawaiian stuff you get into in the first week or so--you'd better learn the lingo or you'd be considered a haole.

When we got there and drove out I could see what Boeke had in mind. Here was a piece of land, four thousand acres, separated by a great gulch on two sides and sloping up, gradually, into the mountains--a sloping kind of plain with green gulches on both sides. And this was your initial site for the classic greenbelt town. It's an acropolis, and there was a giant bridge where the Kamehameha Highway crosses Kepapa Gulch.

As we crossed the bridge we could see this mound of a hill right in the middle of the foreground, and almost simultaneously--maybe I said it first, but in complete agreement--I said, "That's where the tower will go. In the town center." Larry agreed immediately. Both Larrys. So help me, as we worked on it, it seemed like a good place for the town center. But we thought that to distinguish it from just another tract subdivision you had to have a vertical element, and if they did that tower, you could see it from Honolulu!

Riess: And that's what you wanted?

DeMars: I think that was one of the things, sure. "What's Mililani?" "Well, it's that new town you see out there."

The question is, what is the definition of a new town--and not just a subdivision? Well, it has to have all the facilities of a town. It ended up, in our plan there were to be I think two high schools, a dozen elementary schools, a branch of the University of Hawaii, even.

Riess: This was for a population of 60,000?

DeMars: Yes.

The first thing that was to be built was the golf course. Now, here there's a little plotting. That was down at one end where the more expensive houses were going. That was on one side of the highway that went through it.

There would be a great cloverleaf where that highway crossed through the connecting highway--I mean, the connecting main spine of the town. With 60,000 people, you can't have them waiting for

stoplights to get to another part of town. Actually, now, I don't know whether that first cloverleaf has been built. But there was a second piece of highway to go through, about a mile mauka, and that's been built. Now they've moved where the town center would be--unfortunately, we think--but they did go ahead with the first neighborhood village center.

Here we had a complete clear slate, and this fascinated me, because before I was either working on things for poor people or on subdivisions where the subdivision didn't have all the elements that you needed, the schools, the shopping center, the downtown, the big supermarket, all the things you'd have. This would have a golf course and its clubhouse, and then across the big gulch was an industrial park. They could come in, as they do in San Leandro and so forth, with many thousand square feet where you'd build whatever little industries there would be. That would be one of the employment sources, and there would be people taking in each other's laundry, to some extent.

Riess: It wouldn't be a commuter community.

DeMars: It could be that, too, because you're six miles from Honolulu, so it would be a very convenient one.

Another thing, there was a stream that came down through parts of this that could be routed through town, and there would be a series of little lakes, and finally a rather good-sized lake where there could even be boating, as well as sand brought in and a beach there where you could do your sunbathing and so on.

The idea of the golf course thing was that there was a great Japanese population in Hawaii anyway, and so you begin getting them to go here and have lunch, play golf--a nice course. They had one of the prominent designers lay it out.

Riess: Trent Jones?

DeMars: Yes, I think it was. So that was built first, before anything else was done--we were still working on the plans for houses and neighborhoods. Vladimir Ossipoff, a good friend and former classmate of mine, and a prominent and much-admired Hawaiian architect, did the clubhouse. Lots of tropical character, even to the steep corrugated iron roof.

All the properties were to be fenced in a kind of a Japanese manner, so that your garden is a private garden.

Another thing--I have to back up--here's this group of three guys who are going to collaborate on this. This is very much like

Telesis and all that other stuff, too. In Hawaii, they have a name for it. It's called a "hui." That's the Chinese term for a little syndicate, or a combine of maybe different interests who get together to make a buck [laughs] or to promote something. But the three of us were well-acquainted, and in the planning stage of it, which was very interesting, we all had equal say. I mean, Halprin and I could talk about the city planning, or the roads. Our ideas of where this ought to go or that ought to go were respected by the city planner.

What happened later was, when he [Larry Livingston] ran some of the stuff through the computer, it changed which was the main road and which was not, and changed some of the gradients and other such things. But all of this was--those are the conflicting influences on the problem. We weren't going to say, "No, you can't change this." And it really worked. He solved some problems which Halprin and I weren't aware of.

And Larry [Halprin] was right there to talk about the trees that were grown. Of course, in Hawaii they grow so fast. The landscaping, when I went back a year or two later--my God! It looked like it had been there for ten years. So we made the hui, we worked well together, we went back several times.

Then one of my associates, Jack Sidener--. I've mentioned him a couple of times. By this time he was one of our associates in the firm. In fact, I think at that time it was still DeMars and Reay, and John Wells was an associate, John and Jack Sidener. Sidener worked with me on the houses, and we did them in the Hawaiian form--that is, the walls are a single-board thickness on the outside, held up by the framing of doors and windows.

What they do there is build the roof first. You put some posts in, and you have the post that's going to be the corner of the house, a post where the first pair of windows come--it goes to the plate, you see--and then posts on each side of the door. These may be four-by-fours, let's say. Then there's the plate at the top. Then you have some bracing to hold it up while it's there. The next thing they do is build the roof with an overhang.

Most of the tracts were being built by California developers. They were doing California ranch houses with low-pitch, sloping roofs, but with a little bit more overhang than usual, gable ends, and so forth. When we were doing it, the thing that you were most conscious of was a kind of Japanese sort of roof, more of a hipped roof. There'd be roof overhangs clear around since it's going to rain almost every day, and heavy at times. And very often the roof changing its slope, to go up steeply and so on. We were able to do this. It gave some variety, and the roofscape looks totally

different than these other tracts. No telephone poles--all underground wiring and utilities.

The tract builders from stateside, I don't think they used the traditional Hawaiian thing. You want the house--the weather's the same all the time--you want it to be waterproof. I think they use a one-inch redwood board, instead of being down to about three-quarters of an inch, the way it's done stateside. The lumber is all shipped from the States, Douglas fir and everything. When they [in the Islands] build a roof--and you see this little spindly framework under it, with braces and a few extra posts, maybe they put a post of some sort, temporary, every four or five feet, that's enough to hold the roof up, and shingled, so work can go on when it's raining. Then they start nailing the boards on the outside. When they come to one of the temporary posts, they knock the post out, because the board is now holding the roof up. Then they continue right on around.

Inside the house you have posts on either side of doors, which you'd have anyway. It goes through and goes up to the plate. On a window, whatever its size, you'd have a post on either side. It goes down to the floor. This is good because they have a kind of borer bee over there that bores into the house. It gets inside stud walls. So this eliminates that. That was one of the problems that they were solving.

Riess: Did you have a Hawaiian associate who was able to tell you about local design? Vladimir Ossipoff?

DeMars: Well, as I said, Ossipoff did the clubhouse. But Boeke himself was an architect. He had been living for some time in Hawaii with his wife and son. He was our source of Hawaiian building methods, as well as the desired image. I think he was well-acquainted with this stuff. I think they had some builders, too, that were already picked. I think we had some consultation with them. In fact, they even wondered why we were doing it this way, or something. I can't quite recall how cooperative they were or weren't, but they were very happy to help out.

We had some difficulty with the FHA. This was all FHA, you see. Our difficulty came in the site planning.

Riess: Why was it FHA?

DeMars: The FHA guarantees loans for builders' housing. The Golden Gateway was FHA. The developer gets FHA approval of his tract, of his whole development plan, of the house designs and so forth. They are going to guarantee the bank or other mortgager that they will not lose money on the loan. That's all it does. And so if

it doesn't get sold, or something, the FHA takes over the property and disposes of it for whatever it can bring.

Riess: Why did you have trouble with the FHA?

DeMars: The typical FHA development has curvy streets, and all the streets are the same width, because they all lead through to places. We wanted to do ours so that all the residential streets were either on a little loop or on a cul-de-sac, a very narrow street. You didn't drive through any of these places to get to the next place. There was a wider street that was called a collector street. It collected these others. Then there were two main ones, called the distributors. Well, the FHA made us have just as wide a street for the cul-de-sac as for the collectors, even though the houses had a large apron that would take two cars where they could park, in addition to the garage.

We had a contract that they would use our seven house-types for the first four hundred houses they'd build. Well, they decided that it wasn't too monotonous yet, so they did six hundred, but we only got paid for four. [laughs] But that's the way the cookie crumbles, as they say.

One of the things in our whole concept of the site plan would be that there would be a range of price tags. There would be smaller houses up to a rather elaborate house; there would be two-bedroom, three-bedroom, four-bedroom houses. The four-bedrooms, and threes, I think, all had two baths. There was a modest little house that had two bedrooms and one bath that was going to be partially subsidized by the builder, because they had to have a \$10,000 house in there to get approval--something like that. And we were going to have townhouses.

We knew that in the beginning people weren't going to come out and live in apartment houses, leaving downtown, but if the thing began to be built up, then the next step would be some kind of group housing, row houses, maybe two-story. Then we had a one-story adjoining thing that made a little court. We actually didn't do these. We had them on the model, and then they began getting other architects in, because this was several years down the line. At the town center, we had a group of point tower apartments on one side of a park that had a little lake in it.

XVIII NEW TOWNS AND URBAN PLANS

[Interview # 13: May 4, 1989]##

Mililani and Golden Gateway: The Confidence to Persist

DeMars: I would say, thinking about Mililani, that my interest in site planning really started from Farm Security, and the camps and things, and then in the National Housing Agency, when we got into community-size work. The next step was, what would you do about a whole town? It's one thing to design a little subdivision or something, but what are the additional problems of the town? I really found that a very interesting challenge.

The new towns going on in England, and other places where things of that scale have been done, were interesting sources for what was possible when you had a clean slate, starting from laying out streets and everything. If you had some other goal, and were merely using whatever the current standards were, and it didn't matter what it cost, this is the kind of place it would be. We got into that a little bit when we were in Farm Security--the reason for cul-de-sacs and things was to save on utilities, and the amount of paving you had to put in, and the amount of land wasted for all streets without a specialization.

Riess: Mililani had three classes of streets.

DeMars: Yes. Actually, we didn't quite get away with it as far as we wanted to. They wouldn't let us. There was a minimum width for a street that the FHA required--we talked about that--which would have been adequate for a street on which you would drive through, and be a collector kind of a street. We would have saved some yards, but that all adds up.

Anyway, I guess that's the first thing we did on a town scale, really doing a major center and planning employment into the concept. (Bannockburn was still really a little suburban community.) That later became an official category in the FHA,

the PUD, planned unit development, where you have a piece big enough to go directly to the planning commission and say, "We want to propose to do this and mix these dwellings and do this kind of street." And then they simply judge the whole thing on the basis of its merits or not.

Presumably, the FHA ought to do the same thing. I guess they would and do, but at the particular time we did this, the Hawaiian FHA was not about to bend their standards clear that far down. For instance, we wanted to have smaller street lamps on a little neighborhood lane, but we had to have the same great electroliers that we had throughout for lighting the streets.

Riess: How come you couldn't bend them? Who negotiated? Who was actually right there?

DeMars: Well, that would have been Boeke. It wasn't really our role, except if there were any parts that couldn't quite be understood. We appeared a couple of times and talked to them, that is, we who were doing the designing, but we really didn't have that direct contact.

Riess: Do you have a lingering notion that you might have been able to talk them into it?

DeMars: Well [pause], I have that feeling about the Golden Gateway. I wish that we had had enough gall and maybe enough confidence to have somehow beat the developer into continuing to do the rest of the high-rise buildings that made up the original concept. I think if he had had the proper pressure from someplace or other that they might have been persuaded to continue, because a few months later they said, "Why didn't you make us do this?!"

Riess: That is interesting, isn't it? It's not quite in the same category, but I think of Christo and his willingness to put years and years into wringing the kind of promises that he needs out of local authorities.

DeMars: Obviously our top guy was Bill Wurster on the Golden Gateway, and yet I don't think that he would have taken that position, to argue. He had other things to do, other axes to grind. In one sense, this [finishing up] was another project--a big one.

I'm not saying I could have talked them into it. I wasn't that knowledgeable about financial analysis or development strategies, which I assumed Perini was. But I and my colleagues were very much aware of the rate of building cost inflation because of our experience concurrently with other projects in our

office. We assumed Perini was at least as knowledgeable as we were.

The first three blocks along Washington Street were pretty much handled as a continuous project which took at least two years to build. Then they decided to jump over the park to the block on Broadway for the repeat of Wurster's long building, and of course in two years the price had gone up. So they waited six months, expecting costs to level out, I suppose. But the rate of inflation hadn't changed, so the costs were even higher and they simply shut down, with the statement, "Why didn't you architects make us go ahead with the project six months ago when we could have?" Well, maybe we could have persuaded them, maybe not.

So, years pass and finally a young firm of architects, Fisher-Friedman Associates, showed them how they could finish the project at a profit. I knew them all at school as students. They got into real estate development. They've done a number of housing developments in Alameda and elsewhere. I used to take my students down, when I was doing the housing course, to show these as the best examples of what was being done at that time. They knew, in detail, as much or more about the financing and all the inner workings to get projects of that sort off the ground.

By that time at the Golden Gateway the cost of the highrise buildings was considered out of bounds financially, so the last three blocks as finished consist of townhouse condominiums on top of the block-sized podiums containing garaging, offices, shops, restaurants, etc. The podiums are the same height as in our original plans and all connected by bridges over the streets. All this was dictated by our redevelopment plans, which have a legal status as to what the developer may or must do. It even has the arcades which were part of our plans.

But of course the architects had to do whatever they could to not have it look like the same architects had done it, and they succeeded. And the developer made his profit. The city is the loser, since it could have had, as it originally intended, a thousand more desirable dwelling units in the area.

You know, if there hadn't been so many fingers in the pie, and maybe if I had been as argumentative and so forth as I've been on the student center right now, currently--. If you press on long enough and can make enough sense, they finally sort of give in to shut you up, almost, in a way, unless it's absolutely ridiculous.

Riess: I've taken you off on a tangent. Now another one. If I were to ask you what the drawbacks are of these consortiums of architects,

would you say that this is one--that there isn't sufficient energy in any one person to fight for a position?

DeMars: In a way. If I can digress for another moment, we had an excellent lecture last night by Spiro Kostof on the socialist city which he discovered in southern France, near Lyon. Just a couple of people, a rather obscure architect at the time and a mayor developer, had such an absolute grabbing-the-bit-in-their-mouth and dedication to this that they built something which was really quite, in Kostof's mind, revolutionary, architecturally, for its time, which was the twenties, doing a whole number of innovations in the thing.

He had heard about it, read about it, and he just visited it this last year, and so he gave this lecture, which was a prize winner. He's a marvelous lecturer. At the end there wasn't a standing ovation, but it just went on and on like if there had been a curtain call, because we were all exhausted. He must have been, too. [chuckles] But here was a case where the young architect that got hold of it in an early stage was able to convince everybody and just stuck with it. And the mayor, who kept getting reelected and so forth, was determined to do this thing. You can get it done, apparently.

The nice thing about a case like Portman is, of course, he's one of the investors. He doesn't have to argue that hard. When he finally did his piece of the Golden Gateway thing--well, I wouldn't say that he was picking up ideas from us. Those were required, because that became part of the given from the redevelopment agency, the podium that the buildings were to be built on and so on, all of which he welcomed. He thought it was good. I think he did a great job with it. But things like the sidewalks in our piece of the project, they'd say, "We can't afford that brick," and so forth. "Can't you just use cement?" This kept happening, again and again.

Instead of someone being able to say, "No, this is peanuts in the whole thing. We've got to have this," it was sort of accepted, and we kept getting watered down. Not watered down, but I mean--[chuckles]. But you notice in Portman's case he has the sidewalks, tile circular-patterned things going all over, and if someone raised a question on that, he would probably have said, "No, you'll find that it will be economical in the long run. Anyway, I want it." "Yes, Mr. Portman."

Riess: Well, it sounds a little bit like you're saying if Bill Wurster wasn't going to go to bat for it, then it wasn't appropriate for anyone else to?

DeMars: I think he would have had to have been so convinced or something, and he would have to have been able to concentrate on this enough to analyze the economics of the thing, the costs, and put the heads together that did it, and actually convince these people that the inflation which had been going on for so long, there's no sign that it's going to let up. He'd be knowledgeable about such things, in a way, but I think he didn't feel that was his role or something.

Riess: Then whose would it have been?

DeMars: Well, the client wanted to do this, or wanted not to do it, or said, "It's turned off. We can't go ahead with it." I imagine, if I had been in charge of it or something, and the client would be telling me this, I might have gotten some assistance if I had that much conviction of my own. A lot of my conviction comes now, afterwards.

I did think the scheme was great. It did seem to me that it was one case where building out a project made sense, all the arguments for it. I could have gone to Bill, I suppose, and told him, if I had had maybe a little more vision and conviction myself at the time. Frankly, I lacked the knowledge of financing in general to argue with such a developer as Perini--again assuming that was his role in the whole enterprise.

Riess: I shouldn't get you started on hindsight.

Have we finished Mililani?

DeMars: On the rest of it, the concept of having a town center, not merely a little shopping center, we had this laid out, this was proceeding. We were hired to do a certain part of it, and then the whole thing got into some trouble. The people actually running the enterprise--they changed the head, I think even the president of the company got changed.

Part of it was they were losing money every year. Everyone on our side said from the beginning: build a new town, and it's going to be nothing but in the red for five or ten years, until the shopping centers are done and they begin making money. It was said from the beginning and repeated and repeated, but builders would say, "Well, that's nonsense. You don't have to do that. You can build a house and so forth and sell it anytime. We don't need all this sort of thing and all of this nonsense." So they hired builders from the States to come out and do ranch houses. We were a bit disappointed in that, and yet the general concept of the thing has gone ahead.

Hamilton!

DeMars: Another thing, even before construction got started, or detailed plans got made on Mililani, there was a proposal by the same consortium of Oceanic Properties to do a new town near San Jose, in the hills east of Morgan Hill. [Study and analysis done 1966]

There's a lake there called Lake Anderson, which is about four or five miles long. The property is something like ten miles from one corner to the other. In fact, laid down on San Francisco it reaches a little bit farther than going from Hunters Point to Seal Rocks, to give an idea of the size of the thing. This, again, was Boeke's notion. They got the same gang of us together on this one. Mililani had been put on the back burner--or in the refrigerator, I'd say, because there were so many things stopping it at that time. It [Mililani] stopped for several years.

This other project picked up the momentum. We rented another floor of the building that Wurster's office was in where we set up a drafting room and began working on this concept of a new town, for a hundred thousand this time, near San Jose--San Jose with all this pressure of population growth and so on. This time Boeke decided that all the discussions and so forth would be recorded. We had a kind of a secretary, he was an architect, who actually made the notes, and all of this has been recorded someplace. I doubt that it's landed in the library at Cal, but it would be worth tracking down.

About every two weeks the investors--about a dozen of them, from Los Angeles and all over, putting together the thing--they would come in for the next stage of the operation. We had Jack Sidener, who had been working on Mililani, and a city planner himself, and then Halprin as the landscape architect, and DeMars & Reay as the architects. Lawrence Livingston was the general city planner, and he had a couple of men in his office who worked on it. Sidener was working on it for my office, and then Halprin had somebody, too. We didn't build a model of that one--it would have been too big--but we did some small models.

It was interesting. We had a number of experts, for instance a geologist who identified the earthquake faults, the prehistoric slides--I didn't know you had such a category--and, let's see, what other kind of configuration? One of his things was that building right on a fault isn't a good idea because it will creep across the two sides. Nothing important should go on that. But if you're a few hundred feet away from where they've identified

the fault, it's not going to be any worse than it is quite a bit farther away. So after we had the maps--and there were little, smaller faults all over the place--in general, we ran the roads on top of the faults where we could, because a road is easier to repair than a house or a school or something. Then we were to avoid where the prehistoric slides were identified.

Now, this is all in mostly rolling land, and a good deal of it unbuildable, because it's right in the hills. On the planning side, [Highway] 101 goes down the east side of the valley, where the hills start going out to foothills. It was calculated in the early stage that there would have to be four entrances, a couple of miles apart, into the thing, with great cloverleaves--complete separation of this sort. Maybe they were only a mile apart, something like that. I haven't done any research back on all the details, but these are some of the scales of the things.

Then Halprin was making very elaborate studies and plans of getting the place reforested and planting where there had to be road cuts to get in. There was a whole program, quite far beyond just doing decorative landscaping. For example, this lake is there for maintenance of the water table, and so it goes down, and far from being like Lake Merritt, where there's a lovely view, there are going to be times of the year when it's rather ugly. So we decided that the town center and the main concentration, because of the lay of the land, would be at the north end of the lake. Then it was decided to maintain a water level at the north end of the lake, which would require a dam, and the dam would also be a way of getting a roadway around it.

So we ended up with a lake the size of Lake Merritt at the north end of this long lake. Around that, on the hillsides and other little valleys and things, we had a whole mixture of different housing types. There were areas where it was more appropriate for single-family houses and a couple of little villages, one on each side. We had a funicular that took you up on the mountainous side and a whole downtown. There was a major hospital in the center, a large junior college complex, a number of elementary schools. There were these sort of things. All of this is pretty well recorded in slides and everything else.

Now, again, I got busy with other things when it got turned off. They went on. The one who owned the land died not so many years later. We always thought he was a kind of a pirate.

One slight adverse thing was there was a testing ground for rocket engines half a mile away [chuckles] to the east side, and every once in a while, it would go off. You would jump out of your skin and see a great smoke go up in the air.

I had something to do with the name, because they couldn't find a name. One day, we were looking from the place, and we could see Mount Hamilton just above there, the observatory. Somehow, the idea came to me--remember "Oklahoma!" the musical? [gesturing] What is this? An exclamation point. That's the way they always wrote it, "Oklahoma--exclamation point." I thought it would be interesting to call it "Hamilton!" So that's what it was called. (I don't think it is now.)

Riess: So what happened?

DeMars: What happened was that there were so many--there are still--problems with zoning. I think there are still financial problems, and highway access problems, getting these in order and so on. What actually brought it to a halt I don't remember. But then what happened was, they proceeded to sell off parcels, those that could be sold as is, in other words. Of course, they never built the dam and the connection at the north end of the lake.

Riess: The developers, or the partners, sold it off?

DeMars: Yes. As I say, if there had been someone able to decree that it should go ahead, it could have been done.

We walked over a good deal of it. It was rolling land, oak trees all over. But by the time you got through grading it, this beautiful, rolling land--like north Berkeley, the Thousand Oaks area--what was cheap land would be expensive to develop. A lot of those oak trees would not be there when you got through chewing it up. We, I suppose, in an almost perverse way, were rather glad that it didn't go ahead.

Riess: Because it would have meant so much spoiled open space?

DeMars: In a way, yes.

Riess: And have they built in that area?

DeMars: I haven't gone back. I'm sure they went ahead. If it had been possible to carry out, it would have been considered a marvelous place to live, I think. It had many of the aspects of Sausalito--steep hillsides, all of this looking down into this lake. We had the idea of a little ferry that went across to the town center, connected to the hilly side on one side, where you'd get off and take a funicular that got you up to another little place halfway up.

Riess: Gosh! It sounds like you were just playing with neat ideas.

DeMars: Well, these ideas weren't just tossed out. It was, "How would you get up to here?" "Well, I wouldn't be able." "Sure, you get over to here, but you're a long way, and that won't work from this." "Well, you could have a little tramway." "Well, yes, you could. After all, Hong Kong has a funicular that gets up to here."

Do you know Marin Avenue in Berkeley?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: There was intended to be a funicular on that, you know. Somehow, where that circle is, would have been the place where you arrived, the platform at the bottom, and that thing would just have gone up the hill, I suppose, stopping at each cross street, way up clear to the top. Well, live and learn. [pause]

Riess: Tell me what kind of a man Boeke was, to take on these two projects, neither of which sound like they quite--

DeMars: Well, no, I would say that Mililani is quite successful.

He started the Sea Ranch. He's an architect, a very personable guy. We all loved him. I mean, we could see him get into trouble at times, in a way, but a lot of enthusiasm and quite knowledgeable about economics and so forth.

Riess: Did he have opinions about architecture, or did he let his architects be the architects?

DeMars: He had some opinions, but he managed pretty well to not inflict them too much. Except one of the things--he was living in Hawaii during much of that time, so he knew other architects there. This is perfectly understandable. He got us [DeMars & Reay] because we'd had experience in the houses and so on. But there were lots of well-known architects there doing fancy, big houses. And he had Vladimir Ossipoff to do the golf club.

The first little village past the place where we did the sales pavilion, which--don't you think it was kind of cute?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: I have a model of it, still, down in the basement. We did this in my office. They were very delighted with it. We thought that pavilion could be extended and made into a small neighborhood community center. You'd have a wing on it--.

Riess: You were telling me that there were some other architects working on Mililani.

DeMars: Yes. Well, the first shopping center we had pretty well laid out, visually. It looked like a great tribal longhouse, almost, part of it with great Hawaiian roofs. In the model it looked really great, with all the little houses around. Instead, though, they got a guy who was going to do some "real modern architecture," and it is totally at odds. I can't see why Boeke felt that this was the thing to do, because he seemed to like our direction of picking up the Hawaiian motifs and so forth. The shopping center, you couldn't quite tell what it was. It looked like it might have been an auto sales place or something. It was done in stucco and all of the wrong materials, whereas our building would have fit in beautifully.

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DeMars: On Hamilton, we hadn't even wound up planning yet when suddenly Mililani came to life. That's when we proceeded to complete the planning. Hamilton was sort of winding down, so we just kept the quarters where we were working there. The same people were putting Hamilton on the back burner, just to keep it warm, or in the oven--I don't know which expression you'd use. The heat was turned on full blast to get Mililani underway.

One rather interesting thing was, up to this time it hadn't proceeded quite far enough. If you recall in the plans there, in the original plans for Mililani, both the model and the actual drawings of streets, the configuration of the whole thing for the sixty thousand population was finally put to the test by the city planners, running it through computers. (We had them in those days, apparently.) When they came up with the analysis, what we thought were secondary roads were where the major road ought to be, because of the areas that fed into it. In other words, Livingston was able to go through and say, "There's going to be much more pressure on this road to carry, and we should modify the plan."

So the plan still looks like the general plan, but the width of roads and their exact designation took a complete redoing, changed curves and things. Yet I think all of us felt that the first solution was justifiable, as almost intuitive. In other words it's permissible to have a kind of intuitive notion of where the main things in the town ought to be. Some city planners' notion would simply be that you analyze it from a demographic point of view, and automatically things have to be where they are as you put them into the computer, or the coffee grinder or whatever, and this is what comes out. Well, I think you ought to

have a sense of where it would be nice to have things, convenient and so forth. Let that be a greater determinant on the whole character of the town.

I told you about Spiro Kostof's talk about the vision of a couple of guys and their determination. They picked where they felt the center of a city should be, where the place would work, and it was different than where several other people felt it should be--because of someone owning land, for instance. In both Mililani and in Hamilton it was fascinating to have this clear slate, with no piece of property worth any more than any other. That's very different from an existing situation partially developed where you can't build because property is too expensive.

Riess: That's very interesting. I also think it is interesting that you indicate some ambivalence about building on all that beautiful land where Hamilton! was to have been.

DeMars: What the three of us should do sometime--I'm talking about Halprin, Livingston, and myself--we should get together and drive down there and see what's happened, and see if we still feel the same way about it.

Working with Larry Halprin

Riess: Lawrence Halprin's name keeps coming up in these collaborations. His role as landscape architect was more evolved than what had been thought of as the landscape architect's role earlier, wasn't it?

DeMars: I think Garrett Eckbo first helped me realize a landscape architect's sense of exterior space. Trees are objects that take up certain three-dimensional bits of space, and so are buildings. In the past, landscape architects have not been involved at the point where you might place the building, or even have anything to do with what shape it might be. But now architects and landscape architects are in actual practice very often collaborating.

When we did Easter Hill, Larry Halprin was not only involved in the landscaping, but we were really collaborating on the placement of buildings and trees, and the stones. This thing about rolling around these three thousand boulders was one aspect of it, but my recollection is that between the road layout and the relationship of the house types and so forth, that it was a collaboration, and that he was in on all the site planning details.

Riess: Was there ever a tendency to overstep what you might consider to be his bounds?

DeMars: Not really. Our relationships--Easter Hill was the first one. The student center really was the second one. This is where the issue comes up here. I insisted that he be in the competition phase of it, where we were moving buildings around. Some of the young architects who were in our group that were working on it said, "What's this landscape architect doing on this thing? There's hardly any landscape architecture."

"Well, his sense of the relationship of these buildings and his input is really very important," was my answer. I can't pinpoint it, but they began to respect him as that moved along. That was the second incidence of successful collaboration, I felt. He didn't intrude further than--I mean, he was never in the way, intruding, in that sense. For instance, the Ludwig's Fountain came after the competition, and the exact spot that it's in I think is a good example of just the right place. Dead center would have been wrong. It's just the right place, off to one side.

Riess: What was his process when you would present him with a problem? Sketching right away? Talking?

DeMars: Well, I think he did an awful lot of sketching, particularly things where he had a larger role. In some sense you could almost say his role in the student center was quite minor, because there literally isn't that much, but I think the notion of reversing the paving in front of Sproul Hall from the--it's exactly the same pattern as it is on the lower plaza, but it's the reverse. In one case there's brick stripes. In this case, there's a brick background, and so on. I don't know, it might even have been my idea, but I'll assume it was Larry's. I know the fountain was his idea, and where it went.

The other landscaping was rather minor, but again I felt that his input and reaction was very useful. I know that in much of his work, all of his sketching, he has notebooks, dozens of them. It's not a looseleaf binder. He makes notes in the notebook. It's a good idea, because then you can go back. And of course, then you can also publish the notebooks. [laughter] When he has exhibitions, he does this.

He has been involved, since that time, in some really major work. His most major project right now is the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C. which has been picked up again. That's a piece of both landscape and architectural forms. Now many

architects would feel that all these walls and things should have been their problems.

Riess: Yes, well, that's what I was getting at.

DeMars: I told you how we all agreed about where the tower should go from the first moment we saw the site for Mililani.

Anyway, I don't remember any disagreements. I know that he can be pretty feisty. He had some disagreements in his own office and fired everybody at one time.

Riess: I have a magazine article about him that includes quotes like, "I'm Larry Halprin. I do what I do." [laughter]

DeMars: I think that is true.

Urban Design Work

Fremont

Riess: You did a lot of what is called urban design planning. What is that?

DeMars: Yes. Don Reay, being able to show examples of this as planner of several new towns in Britain, was probably the reason why we were invited to do the work we did.

It means looking at the entire section of the environment that you are involved in, including all the details, street layouts. We argued and talked about how a city might be--it ought to be this way or that way--and so on. There were a number of cases around where there were downtowns on the skids. All the big shopping centers and the suburbs were bleeding off the business from downtown. Bleeding off--is that the word? I don't know. Siphoning off, you might say.

There was an attempt to reverse this trend by making the downtown more attractive again. What do you do to make it more attractive? The malls were happening at that time. You take Main Street and turn it into a mall. This was found to have some applications--in very limited cases where it was appropriate and other cases where it wasn't. Squares were open spaces that you planned. You'd plan streets and shops and new signing, all this kind of thing, and maybe rehabilitation of certain buildings, and

"street furniture"--that is, lighting standards, benches, kiosks, trash receptacles, etc.

It would include discussing transportation and bus lines and all the pieces and parts of it. In Richmond, there really wasn't quite a downtown. There was a new little civic center there, but it wasn't really the heart of the place. We were discussing this with businessmen. They had a city planning staff and we worked with them, analyzing what they saw as their problems, and then beginning to put together proposals, to do this and this and this and the other thing, and drawing up what it might look like.

Riess: Then, at that point, you leave the scene? You are consultants?

DeMars: Pretty much, yes. You make these recommendations, and you leave it. It could mean, in some cases, that you could be the architect of this building or that, if you stuck your nose in and started going on the thing, but really this was a package that you left with them to work with. They were part of it--that is, the planning staff. And it could involve community meetings, this sort of thing. The whole idea was to involve the community in it with some people there who did the organizing.

Riess: So that's sort of the model. Then what did you do in Fremont?

DeMars: Fremont, I think, was one of the largest unincorporated new city areas in the state. There really wasn't a scheme for where the heart of this Fremont should be, and what it would be like and so on. We were at a very preliminary stage on that one. We came up with some concepts, and one of the concepts was not to put the city hall where they put it, because it's just right on top of an earthquake fault. [laughing] We were puzzled at this.

Of course, what you do is, you start with existing streets and roads and other such things, and you work with someone in the city on this. At that time it was, as I say, a very preliminary thing. [looking at notes] Where's Fremont in here? What date is that?

Riess: [referring to notes] Fremont was 1960.

DeMars: [counting] Sixty, seventy, eighty--that's almost thirty years ago. Now, of course, we wouldn't recognize it. I didn't recognize it ten years ago when I drove through.

I had a very bright graduate student who, as his thesis, wanted to take on doing the central plan for Fremont. In the stages that we did it, we didn't even do it with building patterns and so forth, particularly. I think it was almost reserved for

the city center, and we listed the things that would go here and so on. He took this, plus communicating with them, and did quite an elaborate study. He was such a great draftsman, he was almost ruining the idea of how much time a student ought to spend! He was getting the other graduate students kind of annoyed. [chuckles] But he was from Texas and has a very successful firm down there which he's the head of now. His ideas came so fast. While some of them are still scribbling on a piece of tracing paper, or the back of an envelope, he already had a model for the critique. Then the following week, a new model. [laughing]

Riess: [laughing] It really enraged everyone, huh?

DeMars: Yes. Then we did a downtown plan for San Jose. I don't know if that even got mentioned here. Jack Sidener was working on that. With him in our firm, you see, the real city planning part of it, the input for densities and demography, a good deal of that he was completely in charge of. Don Reay would work with him on some of these things. That was more his sort of thing than mine.

And we did the 701 Project in Oakland.

Berkeley

DeMars: It might be useful for you to see what we did for Berkeley, the south campus area. I'm going to lend that material to you--I have only one copy. I don't know whether the city or the University knows this plan exists, because there has been a lot of overturn in the city planning office. A lot of the plan has been carried out, too. Telegraph Avenue, I'll show you in a couple of places where from Bancroft down to Dwight it is now almost exactly as we showed in this report.

Riess: The delivery parking bays?

DeMars: The parking bays. To get traffic to move faster, you bulb out at the end of the street, so the ends of the sidewalks are closer together, and people can get across faster. Then the parking bay goes in, gives a bigger waiting place.

We had recommendations for streets, for parking garages, signs, other street furniture, for what ought to be done for additional housing, the rehabilitation of existing houses and so on. The area went from Oxford up to College, I think, and from Bancroft down below Dwight a little.

Riess: [looking at plans] So you studied some of the vintage houses?

DeMars: As examples. We just made suggestions of how these could be rehabilitated and how they could be made, really, very much part of it. We recommended that many places, where there are one-story buildings along Telegraph Avenue in there, really ought to be as many as four- or five-story, with housing above, which is part of the present program.

But how do you talk the people who own the land into putting it out of the market for a year or so while it gets done? It's done all the time, where they'll go in and tear something out. It's been going on along Telegraph and Bancroft where they've gone in and torn out the existing facility in there. So if they can be persuaded that this would be in their interest--or with some joint use, but anyway--

Riess: You did that plan for the city or for the University?

DeMars: This was for the city. It didn't involve the University as such.

Riess: By housing you were not talking about student housing.

DeMars: Well, we were just saying housing in general, and for students. The university would welcome any private enterprise that were to provide more housing for students.

Riess: Was this at a time that the University and the city worked well together? This is 1964. It's before the movement.

DeMars: It was just before. I think that they were able to get funds from some federal programs to help underwrite this, from HUD.

Let's see if there are any others here. [looking at notes]

Riess: There's not a danger of having all cities come out looking the same if you have the same firm of consultants coming in?

DeMars: Well, the thing is, one street could look like another, couldn't it? [pause]

Riess: Okay. We have been looking at this beautifully, meticulously detailed ideal Telegraph Avenue as of October, 1964. Do you think if it all hadn't hit the fan that more of these things might have been completed?

DeMars: I don't quite know. I suppose that was part of it. When you have the inmates busting the bank windows and things as part of the bigger issues of the day--. There were some legitimate issues of

the day, certainly, but I think there was also a group who were riding the wave with great excitement.

You read that piece from Realities, one student answering "What is the revolution about?" said, "It doesn't have to be about anything. It's itself! It's happening, man! Isn't it exciting?!" For young people, when things aren't very exciting, if they have a cause that appears to be legitimate, it's much more exciting. Now the legitimate cause is to get on with your life and make a buck, I guess, which is a legitimate cause, certainly, among others. [laughing]

Riess: This was making the environment better for the students, but that's not a compelling argument for a student.

DeMars: You can't make a mall or a thing provided with all this street furniture and things in a place that's hardly ever used. Of course, that's another reason why the Sproul steps are so great. You have a flood of bodies coming by, and so if you want to sell pies, why, that's the place to do it, right there.

Riess: I said something about the problem of individuality. You sweep through all of these northern California towns leaving behind a report like this, and a vocabulary of street furniture--bollards and newspaper racks.

DeMars: Well, they might change. In the first place, none of those really necessarily are the object, it's just an example. By the time you get them made, or by the time you buy them-- Sweet's catalogue has this stuff, there's so much need for it over the whole country!

Riess: So you don't have to design it.

DeMars: You don't have to design it, necessarily, unless you find all of them at fault. Park benches and things, all the things that make a place work, and certainly garbage cans--[chuckling] he has them. Though that will only get some of the trash. Once a place starts to get "trashed," people say, "What the hell." That goes for the graffiti, papers blowing in the street, and so on.

One of the things I want to show you is the second student union we did, in Sacramento. It's listed here. I visited that, and it looks like it did a week after it was built, except better, because the trees have grown up. There's no graffiti anyplace. It's all clean. This is not in the kind of epicenter of things which Berkeley is. Maybe that poor little street, Telegraph, isn't wide enough to contain all this activity.

Riess: Are you saying that it's the location at Sacramento or the student population?

DeMars: I think the location, plus the student population, and the way the management sees their role. At one point, when we were looking for a new ASUC director, I tried to persuade the director of that one to come and take this over. He said, "Berkeley?! I wouldn't touch that with a ten-foot pole, and neither would any other director of a student union program that is in their right mind." He said it with great, sort of, appreciation. [laughing] I think that term might have been his, "where the inmates are running the institution." He says no other student union in the country has the students actually in charge, running it, making the decisions, hiring the directors, and firing them, and so on. Here, they hire them, and after they don't like them in six months, they fire them, pay them the rest of the year's salary, and send them off.

Riess: Well, that's interesting about Sacramento.

Walnut Creek

DeMars: Let me see if there are any other cities. I'll finish my city thing.

Riess: Walnut Creek..

DeMars: Yes. There was the little city hall in Walnut Creek, probably still is, and then there was a kind of a park section right across the street from it, with a piece of the creek actually exposed there: the Walnut Creek. There are some small Quonset huts from World War II. There are lots of big trees.

It's really quite a nice area, and they wanted to take that area and make it the town center. We were given the problem of all the different things that were to go into it--a major library branch, a new city hall, some offices with this and that--so we gave it that treatment.

It didn't get to that detail, because it wasn't followed through. They got a new city manager, and we made our final presentation. I could show you the plans when we've got the thing turned off another time. It generally seemed to work and was acceptable to them, but this new city manager had some different ideas. The next thing we knew, ours was terminated. We finished what we would have done at that time, but there would have been details following through later.

Then they hired Wurster's firm, to do a second run at it. I don't recall even seeing what they did, but they fired them, too. So I think there are some kind of people who just can't be satisfied. [chuckles]

Riess: Since then, Walnut Creek has grown tremendously.

DeMars: Yes, but this little particular section in there has had a lot of big buildings built around it. I don't know that they have really implemented following through. Again, I have been busy with other things.

So then, also, we did a similar thing for downtown San Jose, with housing as well. I haven't seen that area. As I said, Jack Sidener had a lot to do with that. And Don Reay did some very interesting housing proposals. All sorts of things have happened there, and I really haven't been back. You would think I'd be more curious, but--.

Riess: I guess I would expect to be disappointed, if I were you.

DeMars: Well, I am a little, on this scheme.

Diamond Heights

DeMars: One of the places that I think is kind of interesting is Diamond Heights, where the street layout which we worked on and later had to be engineered is very close to what we proposed in this. It was worked out from a little model. We had engineers and so forth working with us on it, but not in detail, you see. Apparently it satisfied what they were going to do. Then we had these different kinds of housing types more or less zoned for different streets and different areas and locations. That was pretty much carried out.

The little shopping center, the school--all of these things are very much as we thought of them. And since what we proposed was so general, whatever they did, if they followed the rule roughly, it would be acceptable. I mean, it was exactly our idea, except that we had in mind some higher apartment houses in the middle of it. They didn't quite do that. It doesn't have the image of projecting up and making a tower that you can see from around and say, "That's Diamond Heights." That's the only part of it that didn't go. But that project I don't feel disappointed in.

Riess: Yes, but there was a different kind of commitment there.

DeMars: That's true. Well, but that was the nature of that commitment. Typically, on these general things, you have to figure--one of Don Reay's lines could be quoted. He said, "If you're in at the beginning, you won't be in at the end." [laughter] A bit of cynicism, because he was very disappointed in what they did with Stevenage.

Don did a marvelous town center for Stevenage. He wasn't the first architect on Stevenage, but he came in at a sort of medium point. (I'm talking about Stevenage in England, one of the new towns.) Then when it came to the point of doing a downtown center for Stevenage--and Stevenage is a real new town in that it has industry, it has its own base--for the town center they got Clarence Stein to be their consultant. They laid it out. It had a mall inspired by American towns, and Don had a clock tower in the middle. They pretty much carried it out, except he had already left there, and his clock tower was watered down. It's not nearly as exciting as his version of it, and so he feels greatly disappointed, but a little proud that they carried it out as far as they did.

Ghirardelli Square and the Cannery

Riess: We have on the outline Inner Harbor at Baltimore, and the notion of Rousification, which is practically a dictionary word now. Apparently, one of the earliest redevelopment efforts was Ghirardelli Square. Am I right about that?

DeMars: Well, one of the first things where you--

Riess: --take existing buildings and turn them into shops and keep the flavor of the old building. Ghirardelli was largely Halprin and Wurster.

DeMars: And following close on its heels would have been the Cannery, in which the only thing "saved" was the outside brick walls. I didn't realize this till later, even having gone through it and so forth. I would have assumed that some of the interior stuff was original, but in fact it was totally gutted.

Esherick and his gang--I think their hearts really were in it. They have all this fun and pretend that if they didn't have the constraints of purism and modern architecture and so forth, you could build with brick and all that, so it's all brick arches

and things inside. People might think that that was the way it had been.

Jim Rouse and Baltimore's Inner Harbor##

Riess: What was your involvement with Inner Harbor in Baltimore?

DeMars: The way we got involved was that Rouse has a project in Baltimore called Cross Keys. It's out of town, lots of trees and growth and so forth. It was one of these communities with a gatehouse, and completely protected, a guard to let you in and out. It would be like Rossmoor, but not that big--I can't even remember how many acres at the present moment.

He had already built some housing in it, and I guess by hearing about it from someplace or other, we were invited--Don Reay and I--to go back and give him our pitch as candidates to do some additional housing, a mixture, from row houses to a large apartment house. Then there was going to be a shopping center--we weren't doing that--right inside the gate, and so forth.

We went back there, and among the things we showed him were our plans for Santa Monica, which got him very excited. He decided that that would be exactly what he would like to do there. Of course, it was a totally different situation--quite hilly, this piece of land, and so forth. The Santa Monica thing, after a little bit of study, really didn't quite apply. Working together on it, we had several versions of the thing. Did I ever show you any pictures of this, or didn't I?

Riess: No.

DeMars: All right. I won't show it to you on the tape, but I have them in my box there.

What happened was that Rouse had a certain builder that was working on this. We went clear through the planning and working drawings, and the contractors bid for construction. But the builder was in earlier on, so that as we worked on it he consulted with us and gave us estimates. Finally, at the stage of what we call the "design development phase"--not "preliminaries," not "conceptual," or whatever it is--when you've decided what you want and have had everybody agree, and you draw it at the final scale and you don't have, maybe, all the details worked out quite, maybe there are some door swings that might be changed, but mostly everybody has worked on it--.

When you start the working drawings, so-called, or the "construction documents," there are supposed to be no changes at all. Well, we got it to this stage, and he had his firm estimate it. But he already had the contract, he didn't have to worry about that, you see, so it came out at x-dollars. Then, when the final drawings were done, identical to the earlier drawings, with just some more information on them about certain things--when they really got down to bid it, it comes out about a half million dollars more. I think it was six or seven hundred thousand dollars over for something which hadn't changed!

Well, we flew back there and went through it with him and so forth, and it was just obvious that they were not taking it seriously enough earlier on. They also weren't bidding against anybody. We complained along the way. We said, "You know, there's no control, there's not even alternate sub-bids and so forth on this kind of thing." "Well, he knew from experience." (We were dealing not with Jim Rouse--isn't it Jim Rouse?--but his brother, who was the hardheaded guy.) When this happened, we thought, "My God, here's this hardheaded guy that lets himself get taken down the road this way."

They had started. They even made the excavation for the site, because they were going to start construction right away, you see. Well, I think they just abandoned the project and didn't do an apartment house there at all. We were recompensed--obviously not as well as had it gone through. Again, it put a slight blight on--. We didn't escape getting blamed for somehow being the reason this happened.

Riess: Half a million on some projects would not be that significant.

DeMars: Well, when I said half a million, God, maybe it was much more than that. Whatever it was, it was a sufficient amount to tip the scales over beyond what they were planning.

But at that same time the head of the redevelopment agency there knew about our involvement in that project as well as some others, and they put together what they called a task force to make a study of the entire Inner Harbor area. It was the firm with Ian McHarg, a very famous landscape guy who was part of the firm of Wallace, McHarg, Roberts & Todd. Wallace was the architect principal.

We were part of this task force to talk about the bigger concept of the whole area. We had just finished Golden Gateway around the same time. They were talking about highrise buildings and about more housing for different income groups and so on. So

that was our main input--to make, really, a detailed proposal for housing types. Again, they were also fascinated with Santa Monica, and we tried to work it out. But for the income group they were trying to appeal to, it was just going to be a little too expensive. Then it got phased out.

In fact, the redevelopment agency head--this black man was very nice, and very appreciative of my role in the thing, but he died. Maybe some other people were not so appreciative of my role, so far afield. We just didn't get asked back to pursue any of this further. I think Wallace did some high-rise nearby.

The thing along the waterfront, Harborplace, I haven't been there to see it, but I liked the design. It looks like the kind of thing that would have been done in the nineteenth century. I think that's the message that's getting around--the breakthrough into post-modernism, but the kind of thing in which to be freer in your design. Rouse believed in that.

Another way I got involved with Rouse was through Bill Finlay. He was the graduate from city planning in Berkeley who became city planner of Richmond. You heard me speak of Fritz Gutheim several times. When they were considering a new planner for Washington, D.C., for the entire area he said, "One of the people being considered is Bill Finlay. What can you tell me about him?" I told him that he's a real can-do kind of guy that steps on a lot of toes and rocks the boat. Knowing Washington a little bit, as I did, having spent six years there, I said, "I imagine the reason you're considering a new planner is that the last one never stepped on anybody's toes and also didn't get anything done."

He said, "Yes, that's pretty much it."

I said, "Well, I think Finlay's your man, then."

After Finlay had been in Richmond for a few years, either then, or a little later, when he went to Washington, he said, "A city planner, if he's going to get anything done, has about five years. By that time he's already made so many enemies he can't get anything more done." I repeated this to some Washingtonian who was involved in this whole thing. He said, "Well, you're certainly right about that, except he missed by about two or three years." [laughs] He had made his enemies.

Conference on Environmental Beauty, Asilomar, 1965

Riess: What was the Asilomar Conference on Environmental Beauty?

DeMars: Ah, yes. What was the date of that?

Riess: That was 1965. It was the Asilomar Conference on Environmental Beauty, sponsored by the Housing and Home Finance Agency.

DeMars: Yes. HHFA--Housing Home Finance Agency, which later became HUD.

Riess: Yes, and what did they turn to you for?

DeMars: Well, housing is what they were concerned with. So they pulled together some architects, some planners, and so on. The date was after the Free Speech Movement had gotten going. In other words, the movement among the dissidents and the counterculturists was pretty well-launched, it seems to me, by that time. The incident that I'm going to refer to--let me find it here. [looking through notes]

The question was, what could you do in housing, and how could you improve it, and so forth. Saul Alinsky was there. He was a kind of radical activist, with quite a theory of this business, of how you manipulate a group of people to accomplish certain kinds of things. If you do it the right way, you'll achieve your ends. Later on we got to talk to him, but I had never heard of the guy before this particular conference.

We were all out at Asilomar, that lovely place, with sand dunes and all this quiet environment. Saul Alinsky was meeting with a group of young seminarians in another room. I think they were mixed Protestant seminarians of some sort, and he had gotten them worked into a lather about accomplishing certain social goals and so forth. We were almost at the end of our meeting, and I forget what we were talking about--better landscape architecture and housing projects or something--and they were invited to come in and sit with us for a moment and maybe talk about this.

Well, they just burst into the room. Here we were talking about housing, and he was saying something like, "We don't give a goddamn about your aesthetics and housing and so forth. In fact, if you're going to give us housing, we'll say, 'Stuff it!' We're gonna take it, because we deserve it anyway. This is the way the people are going to get these things, not through your graciousness!"

He went on in this way, and a couple of his neophytes also had been sufficiently worked up. They added to it, and we were stunned. You can imagine this group. [laughing] I think then they gathered up and walked out, and we said, "Wow. How about that!" or something.

But it was at a point of real radical activism. It was like we were saying before--you know, "What's the point of all this?" "Well, housing is something that the people deserve, and we're not going to wait around for you to give it to us, and all of your programs and so forth. We're going to do it ourselves, or we'll make it, or take it away from you." And then they stormed out.

Riess: Was Alinsky actually part of the HUD meeting?

DeMars: No, he wasn't.

Riess: In a way, he might very well have been brought in.

DeMars: Well, it would have been interesting, because if he had participated, we might have heard it rather than as just a mere bombshell, you see.

Riess: You were so busy during the sixties. Can we go into a whole other chapter of your life?

DeMars: Try it.

Riess: I will try. [laughter]

Staging Areas for Free Speech

DeMars: Meeting on this business about a monument to free speech--they want to propose having a podium permanently there. I brought up the thing that I had to go through at that time: when things had quieted down a little bit from the first impact of the Free Speech Movement, the Mario Savio phase, and they cut down the loudspeakers on Sproul steps from starting at eleven o'clock and being heard down on Shattuck Avenue and so forth, they finally got the students to agree that the University would provide the microphone and the speaker, and they would monitor how loud it would be, and it would only take place between twelve-five and twelve-forty-five--.

Well, they accepted that, but still, in a sense, they had taken over the steps. No one said, "If you would like to have

free speech, you can stand over here and we'll make a permanent thing." If we had given it to them, that would lose about half of the impact of the fact here was a convenient place, which technically worked out, but it continues to be something which they have "liberated," wouldn't you say? I think it would be a great mistake now, because it says: The University has allowed you to speak here. They allow them grudgingly to speak there, in a sense, which is fine, as long as that continues.

Riess: You're saying it would be a great mistake to institutionalize it.

DeMars: Yes, right, just let it happen as it is.

Earlier on, in our scheme for the lower plaza, we had the concept of this bear on a column. From the very time of the competition it was included in exactly the spot where it occurred. Then we thought, "Well, what they need is a staging down there for times when they do have university meetings. So we'll combine the two." We had a thing about fifty feet long, which would have steps leading up to it, and there would have been a little podium and some benches, and you could sit there, and then at one end of it would be the column of the bear.

Well, when the Free Speech Movement had rolled underway and we saw this other thing happening, we decided that for the same reason they would find this even less acceptable, because you have the whole symbol, not only of the University, but of the state, right here hovering over them, and they're down below. As it is now, there are some steps that go up to the bear. You could stand on that if you want to harangue the crowd. It's obvious it's not just made for that purpose. The other would be for that purpose. You would see that with the benches and a speaker stand.

Riess: You still could have had it there.

DeMars: We could have. I have in mind a staging--in fact, I was asked about this--which we think now belongs right in front of Zellerbach Hall. It might even be a bandstand, and it could also be for dramatic things.

Riess: It also could be for just sitting around on.

DeMars: Yes, that's another thing. But, again, it should not be quite as formalized. It shouldn't have quite the symbolism that this other would have with the bear as part of it.

Riess: It seems to me this takes its course no matter what your plans.

DeMars: Well, that's true, but the other thing is: having seen things happen down in the lower plaza, the central focal point is right where the balcony of Zellerbach Hall is. Speakers will be under there. A couple of times, where they've had a huge crowd, they've done that, or a band will group in there. Actually, a platform there would be helpful. I think it could even be permanent, because it's not in the way of people going through. Anyway--.

Riess: We shouldn't get waylaid.

DeMars: No, but I think the Alinsky experience served to help us think, "Well, you know, there is a kind of a point that he has there."

One Percent for Art, and Golden Gateway

Riess: Your membership on the San Francisco Museum board is like a whole other milieu that you work in. You really have a power base in San Francisco, it seems to me.

DeMars: Well, did I tell you how that happened?

Riess: Let's hear about how that happened and your connection with Mortimer Fleishhacker.

DeMars: Yes. Well, my connection with Fleishhacker was that he was one of the actual people involved in the financing of the Golden Gateway, and, I think, an investor in it. So he was on the board that sat in on some of the design.

For projects of that sort that HUD has subsidized--and this seems to be almost the current situation--there was one percent for art. Well, when you have a big project like that, you've got quite a bit to pay for art. And so we had an international competition for the fountain that's in the middle of the park, the four columns. (It's called the "Four Seasons" or something, not one of the most spectacular.) But the point is, we were permitted to make all the decisions about the kind of art in our particular buildings.

In Wurster's slab buildings there was a large lobby like a public building, so Bill had Mark Adams do a mosaic, which is across from the elevators. It's quite a large one, and very nice. But we felt that that had kind of a commercial quality, what you expect when you go into a bank or a high-rise building with a bank of six elevators and so on.

Now, our lobby in the point towers is like a small apartment house. It's twenty-two stories times eight at each floor. We felt that the lobby could have a more residential character, furniture, sculpture, and maybe paintings, whatever. That seemed to be the idea. At this point, the main proposer for the art was to be a committee made up of the architects and the directors of the three major museums of the city who would propose some artist.

Riess: Relating to this project or relating to all new public buildings?

DeMars: No, no, just all at the Golden Gateway.

Anyway, they had picked out some things, and we went to see them. One of them was a thing by Alvin Light, the sculptor. It was all done with pieces of tree trunk material pegged together and a crooked limb that went up into a great thing about eight or ten feet high. It would sit in the corner. This was picked by the head of the Museum of Modern Art. Alvin Light was a hot number at that time. The director went over and said, "This is a remarkable piece. It really is. It's very characteristic of his work, because, well, do you realize that almost every inch of the surface has been touched by the artist's hand?" [laughter]

I think at that point I turned to Morty Fleishhacker, and I said, "I should hope so."

Then the art director said, "In ten years you'll see what this is worth." This annoyed me, too. This showed the museum directors' priorities: "Will it bring a big price when we de-accession it?" What we wanted was an interesting piece for our building. When they were out of earshot I allowed, "You know, it looks to me for all the world like a hatrack in Old Faithful Inn, in Yellowstone Park," which it did. [chuckles] Do you know Old Faithful Inn? A lot of it is hunks of tree trunks, crooked, to hold up balconies. Now I would be more tolerant, I think, a little bit, but this sort of "anything a guy who says he's an artist does--"

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Board, and the Museum Space##

DeMars: I think within just a couple of weeks of that I was invited to have lunch with Fleishhacker and one of the other people on the board. I think it was at the Family Club. After talking to me at some length about it, "Would I be interested in being on their

board?" And so I thought, well, maybe I should be interested, and would be. That's the way it happened.

Riess: Now, of course, they have a new building in the planning. Were you used on the board as an architect, to think like an architect?

DeMars: Yes, and that may have been one of the reasons, among other things, because not much had been done to change the building from the way it was when Grace Morley was the director. She just took it [in 1936] as the space. Dan Volkmann was also a member, and the other one was Chuck Bassett. In other words, there were three architects on the board.

I think quite soon after that the issue came up of remodeling the space, freshening it up, and lighting, and all the things. Actually we discussed some of the things that might be done. I wasn't going to go very far at all in doing what they did, but then I found that our little committee was recommending to the board that David Robinson be the architect to actually carry this out, since there would have been a conflict of interest to having a member of the board be the architect--though that didn't prevent Dave Robinson from becoming a board member as well. [chuckles]

Riess: I don't know that name.

DeMars: At that time, he was just starting out, you might say. Now, I think he's the president of the Berkeley [University Art] Museum board. But anyway, very capable. I think rather well-to-do, because he has a significant collection of modern art himself, which is how he got on the board, and a nice guy, friendly guy--all this sort of thing.

Riess: What were the other issues when you were on the board?

DeMars: There was the first remodeling, you see, which sort of scraped the moldings off, lit the corridors with lighting which reflects under there, closed off the skylights--maybe not all of them. I think a couple are left.

Riess: This is what Robinson did. But I wondered what other--

DeMars: Then there began to be messages coming through that they needed more space, and where could they get it? This went on for several years. There was a special building committee, and I suppose we were the building committee, the three architects who were on the board. "What were the possible means of expansion of space?" This would be talked back and forth, and they began creeping through the rest of the building a bit, in dealing with the veterans and so forth.

They got the whole floor below the third floor, with the auditorium going up through that--that's why it's just corridors and outer offices around that. I think for a while they just had a few rooms there, and then, little by little, they managed to get the whole area and the corridors themselves. It took a bit of remodelling. I think Robinson handled that; he, for a number of years, handled minor things.

Frankly, once he had the job, I don't think it was a conflict of interest. I mean, he was available to do it, and he had studied the place, and his heart was in it, and all the rest of it. He had an office that was capable of doing it. It wasn't as though he could get jobs by pulling strings. They could turn him off anytime they wanted to, I guess, which they finally did, and that is because a couple of people thought it was a conflict of interest. Either he could drop doing the work for them or drop being on the board. He decided to drop being on the board.

Riess: So did they get a good deal of free design and program thinking from you and Bassett and Volkmann?

DeMars: Bassett left after a bit, but Dan Volkmann was on for a long time. I think I survived him, because I was on about twelve years, which is a long time for now. I don't know--in fact, I was going to recommend somebody for an architect to be on the board. I was going to recommend Dick Peters, because he's quite a collector himself of modern art. Some of it's quite nutty, which is perfect. I haven't followed through on that quite yet.

Riess: But did they get their pound of flesh from you?

DeMars: Well, I think so. Of course, we paid for our lunch that we had. It was an interesting lunch. It was one of the best bargains in town. It started off at two and a half, and then five dollars, and so forth, and there were always some drinks to start in with. I enjoyed the association with these people, and I have to say I admired how hardworking they were, and how much time they put in, and how serious they were about the whole thing.

Riess: When you were on the board were you involved with fundraising?

DeMars: Not myself personally, but the board was. In the first place, members of the board were expected to be part of the participants.

Riess: Were you supposed to, or was your contribution supposed to be in-kind?

DeMars: I was taken aside by Fleishhacker, who said, "You know, we don't expect you to--." We talked about it at the board, you see. I think they expected at least something in the four or maybe five figures coming in from board members. I probably came through with about a thousand bucks a year, maybe, and starting off lower down. I thought I could or should do a bit more about it.

They didn't talk about numbers at board meetings, but they would have reports on things, events, and show the works of art they were proposing be bought, and sometimes even vote on them. Usually there was a subcommittee of the board that reviewed works being proposed for purchase.

Moses Lasky. Is that a name that you know of? A prominent attorney. He was the attorney for the museum. He's retired now, but he did loop-the-loops over this word "deaccessioning," and I don't blame him. It meant not selling, but--

Riess: But it was selling.

DeMars: Well, yes, and the word! We want to "deaccession" this. It is the damndest clumsy term, and he very eloquently talked about what a blockbuster of a term this was.

Riess: That's a problem for museums where the donors and the artists may be alive, and they find their art on the market and being sold for peanuts.

DeMars: Yes. I would think if the artist were still living, they almost should have his permission.

Riess: So that came up as a whole philosophical question?

DeMars: Yes, but not very far. It would be discussed, and if anyone had anything to say about it, they did. All this was a learning process for me, too. I mean, it wasn't all architectural, and I enjoyed learning what was going on. We voted on some things.

Riess: Did you actually vote on whether a work of art should be purchased by the board? It sounds like a totally unwieldy situation.

DeMars: No. There was a committee of maybe of about a half dozen and they recommended a purchase, and they brought the stuff up. The board would vote, and if there were serious questioning, which I don't ever recall there being-- In fact, I discussed this with Fleishhacker one time. It seemed to me that if we had a board, and opinions were asked and so forth, maybe they should be aired a bit [laughs], because afterwards you would have someone saying, "Gosh! I thought that was awful, that thing we just voted on."

And someone else would say, "I don't like that kind of stuff anyway."

Riess: Did you feel that the board was supposed to be sympathetic with modern art, or was it supposed to be a cross section of the population?

DeMars: Oh, no, not a cross section of the population.

Riess: Well, I mean of the wealthy and educated population.

DeMars: I don't think that they were hoping to get some nineteenth century fundamentalists on there to represent other values.

Riess: Did you hear people saying, after the vote was over, "I haven't a clue as to what that painting was all about."

DeMars: Oh, yes, and there were several where I didn't have a clue. I may have spoken. But not too often.

Riess: That was not the forum for debate.

DeMars: Not the forum for it, unless someone was bold enough to speak up. I think we felt a little bit intimidated that there was this special committee of the board that reported back to the board.

Riess: Was it a changing committee?

DeMars: It changed over time. I think that the director was on it, of course, and that certain curators would be on it. Then maybe half a dozen members of the board itself would be on it.

At some of the meetings, if there were something special about some of the people on the staff, where their involvement was maybe to curate a particular new show coming up, they would attend the board meeting as well and tell what the thing was about, and talk about the opening, and so on.

Riess: How important do you think that board was? Was that a rubber-stamp operation?

DeMars: Well, no, because you had to certainly have some kind of a board of directors. Then there was a financial director on the board, and then they also had outsiders who would come in and audit the entire financial situation of the museum. This was reported to the board. That would be a whole session--what the health of the whole situation was at the time. Then the financial director was an investment counselor, investing the funds. He reported on this and told how they were doing, and so on.

There were several board members from Los Angeles. One of them was very, very prominent. Her name was Marcia Simon Weisman. She's very prominent on their Temporary Contemporary [Museum] and all the big museums.

Let me see, what else? Later on there was the question again of space. What could they do if they had more space in the future available, or what could happen if they could get the veterans out of there? They searched around. They would even build them [the veterans] a building which would be more suitable to their needs.

Riess: Because the museum liked being located in this wonderful, classical complex.

DeMars: They did, and a lot of them still did. I do, too. I think there is a certain electricity generated between the classical setting and the contemporary art. The earliest modern art, particularly paintings--those are not best seen in modern buildings. I mean, they were bought to hang in your house. When you see some of the Impressionists in the Phillips in Washington, D.C.--do you know the Phillips Gallery? To walk around the corner of a little room, which was a former bedroom, and see this marvelous painting taking up that whole wall, is almost more exciting than seeing a building all designed like a bank lobby or something to show these things.

Evie Haas, on several of the discussions of moving from that building, she would be rather reluctant. But she wouldn't speak her mind out except afterwards, sort of. Again, because she was there to chair the meeting and that sort of thing.

But a couple of the other stages, if you want to go into this for a bit.

Riess: Just a bit, because I have another subject for today.

DeMars: One was, if you could get the veterans out, you could have a great restaurant facing that garden court in their building, which would be facing south. You could have a real Parisian cafe in there, which would be open at all sorts of times, you see. Even now, a few people come from work in City Hall and go to the little cafe inside the museum, but it's really inadequate for any large number of people. This could be a first-class, major restaurant. It could have all that classy setting and so forth.

Then the question was, wouldn't it be logical to build out the building on the Franklin Street side? (This is exactly the thing they did on the Opera House. We were involved in that. And I think this ought to still be done.) So then Robinson took the

problem of what would happen if you did that, and could you make the museum work with this additional "bustle," as it was referred to. It would be done in that architecture, but have escalators and things. It needed a new entrance.

Riess: "Done in that architecture?" What do you mean?

DeMars: Sorry. Done in the classic architecture. It wasn't considered even for a second that you would build, as some moderns would propose, a glass and steel thing on the back of it, but you would carry it out to match the way it was done on the Opera House.

Then there were several proposals for how you could find the identification to get into it. Here would be this major new wing with escalators in it clear back there, and new elevators and so on, and it really needed a new entrance back there. They talked about different things, but nothing specific.

Earlier on, when I was involved in the Performing Arts Center, while we were working on it, we had made a small model of the entire site, with City Hall and everything else. The next stage was to be to blow up the model to a larger scale, of just the court itself. At this point we were proposing that the new symphony hall would be across Franklin Street on axis with the City Hall, and it would face out on that little memorial park in there. So I had had a model made. Jack Hillmer made the model. Did I show this to you?

Riess: No.

DeMars: I will at some other time. On our original model of the whole group, the Veterans Building was about two inches high. Now, this came out, and it was about five inches high, so the courtyard was eight inches across and so forth. I had made that model. It was in a box in my garage here. At one time Henry Hopkins [the director]--they were talking about different ways of getting in, and he said, "Couldn't there be a little glass pavilion that might match the architecture, and yet would be all glass and steel and of the present time?" He was trying to counter some other proposals which didn't sound very attractive to us. Then that was dropped.

I guess I must have been retired by this time. I didn't tell anybody about it, particularly, but I thought, "Well, maybe it could be done." So I took it on. Assuming they would build out the bustle, you had to get into the bustle with something that you could see was the entrance. (It's the same problem as the Louvre, which hadn't come up yet.) In other words, here you're trying to get into a building that's there, and there's no obvious entrance.

So I did a little thing in the manner of Cesar Pelli, the architect who did the addition to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I did some studies. I thought one thing they needed was a larger bookstore. So in mine the entire ground floor was going to be the bookstore, except for a central entry, and then a circular stair that would lead you up, and there would be a great restaurant that would look out at the City Hall.

The top floor would be a gallery. You could take an elevator to it, and it also would have a galleria. (This is before every other building in the city added a galleria!) Then up above, on this gallery floor, there would be a bridge that went across into the museum at the upper level connecting with the museum level that they now have there. I think that's the way it worked.

I built the model, took it over, showed it to Evie, and [Henry] Hopkins, and so forth, and they were quite delighted, and so on, but it was taking off in another direction by this time.

I'll just mention one direction it was taken off in by the committee. That was to gut Herbst Hall completely. You wouldn't bother with the bustle. David Robinson carried through that design. So you entered from Van Ness Avenue into a great new lobby, because you had all of this to work with. Well, a lot of us were horrified. I thought I'd have more influence if I kept quiet and found out what really they were planning to do, rather than to object to it then.

Riess: Well, I think I'm going to stop here, rather than getting into the Performing Arts Center, though I certainly would like you to think about that for next time.

DeMars: All right.

XIX PERFORMANCE SPACES--ZELLERBACH HALL AND DAVIES HALL

[Interview 14: May 11, 1989]###

Student Center: The Student Office Building

Design Responsibility, and Pereira and Luckman Entry

DeMars: You asked what was the relationship with Don Hardison on the whole student center program. The reason we were being associated with Hardison is he had a large office--that is, Hardison, Komatsu, and so forth. Don Reay and Vernon DeMars--DeMars & Reay--had a small office under the elevator on Shattuck Avenue.

I had been associated with Don Hardison on Easter Hill Village, which was a successful project, it was felt, and this is why they felt we could work together and why they put us together for another--that is, the University felt this. So, while we were working on the competition itself, we thought of it as being four buildings, and it was described as such, and it came out that way. I won't go into all the other reasoning.

We had some bright students, recent graduate, pulled in to work on the competition entry also.

Riess: Please talk about what we spoke of off tape, about what Pereira and Luckman had in mind.

DeMars: Well, it's kind of interesting. In the jury's comments, if you'll remember, they said they thought that a competition isn't always the best way to achieve something, but in this particular case, they thought an extraordinary solution had been achieved. They didn't go on to say what might have happened.

Pereira and Luckman--probably their experience was doing hotels for Las Vegas--they came up with a gigantic building that stretched from Telegraph Avenue down to Dana Street: one big, long

building along Bancroft, throwing a gigantic shadow, you can imagine, on the rest of the site.

Riess: How many stories?

DeMars: Oh, it went up and down different heights, as I recall it. The auditorium and theater were inside of the building someplace. The point would be, if you're going to build this in stages--I don't recall quite where they chopped it off--and then if somebody else got the job afterwards, what did that person do with the rest of the piece? Would he continue it down in their architecture?

Riess: Because you knew that that was a chance, that someone else might get the rest of the job.

DeMars: Well, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, Don Reay, my associate, who had been chief architect for several new towns in Britain, had a line, "If you're in at the beginning, you won't be in at the end," [chuckles] on a long-range project such as those are. And, of course, the student center took ten years to build. That was very true. I think it was a realistic point of view. Our approach also, I think, reduced the impact of the total thing--that was our feeling. Luckily, the jury agreed with us on all these counts.

Riess: Reduced the impact?

DeMars: Breaking down the scale of it so that it fitted with other sizable buildings.

Riess: You were saying that the university had had enough of blockbusters like Dwinelle and Life Sciences.

DeMars: Yes, I think that was one of the things.

So Hardison, when it appeared that the student office building financing was available and so forth, made the suggestion, "Why don't you let us do the student office building, which is assured of now and is a smaller job than the theater, and you do the theater. Say you do 95 percent, and we'll keep a finger in 5 percent for publicity and things of this sort. You'll have the same relationship on the student office building: we'll have 95 percent responsibility for that, we'll do the working drawings and so forth. When it comes to the theater, you do the entire design."

As we were working on it, it was one of the things I did have the most to do with--well, besides the union. I had my finger in all of them, but I was particularly interested in the theater while we were doing the competition. When we really got going

about a year later, I got Tom Aidala, who had been the student working on it for us when we were doing the competition, to come back and be head designer--my left hand man, you might say. He's now a prime consultant for the City of San Jose on all of their downtown development. Also, for quite a while, he was with the planning staff in San Francisco. Alan Jacobs is a great admirer of his work. A very talented guy.

Riess: What about the student office building as a piece of architecture?

DeMars: Well, I tell you, I wish that we had--now, when I see it--made it shorter and somehow maybe even lapped further down. There are a couple of views--as you came through Sather Gate, you saw the entire profile of the student union building against the sky, and you got the profile of the trellis, particularly on the west side. You saw between the columns and so forth, and you saw a clear piece of sky beyond there. It was framed in the Sather Gate--it made a very attractive focus.

Well now, if we were looking north instead of south it would have been a completely different problem, probably. But looking south, it's almost always in a degree of silhouette--the Student Union building--and as it now is with Eshleman going up the ten stories, it blends in right with the height of the top as you see it from Sather Gate--walking under Sather Gate from the campus side. The trellis--the top of it--meshes right in.

Riess: I get the idea, from what I've read, that somehow you're not responsible for that building.

DeMars: No, that isn't true. I have to take responsibility for most of what it looks like. In fact, I think the Bancroft side, with its lids, came from Hardison's office, and it does, I think, add interest to an otherwise rather bald facade. Unfortunately, the north side, since it really seldom has sun on it, doesn't have enough modeling. It looks just kind of stripped.

Also unfortunately it makes too good a place for the students to paste up everything under the sun. The whole thing becomes a gigantic billboard, which I don't mind too much when they've given a little thought to it, but many students are not graduates in art or architecture and couldn't give a damn for what the whole environment looks like, if they have a political point to get over.

The University attempts to extract the highest standards in practically everything else, but not in a situation like this. They wouldn't let this go on in any other part of the campus, really, but they sort of wash their hands of the situation. So I

feel--maybe I should have anticipated that the facade would look the way it does on the north side.

At several points while the whole student center was being developed we started a model in our office on a rather large scale: an eighth of an inch to the foot. There were a number of things at this scale that you really needed to compare. When we were particularly concerned about some of the relationships of the dining commons and its roof and so on, we had that built, and then when it came around to doing the next building, we built a model of that.

Regent McLaughlin Suggests

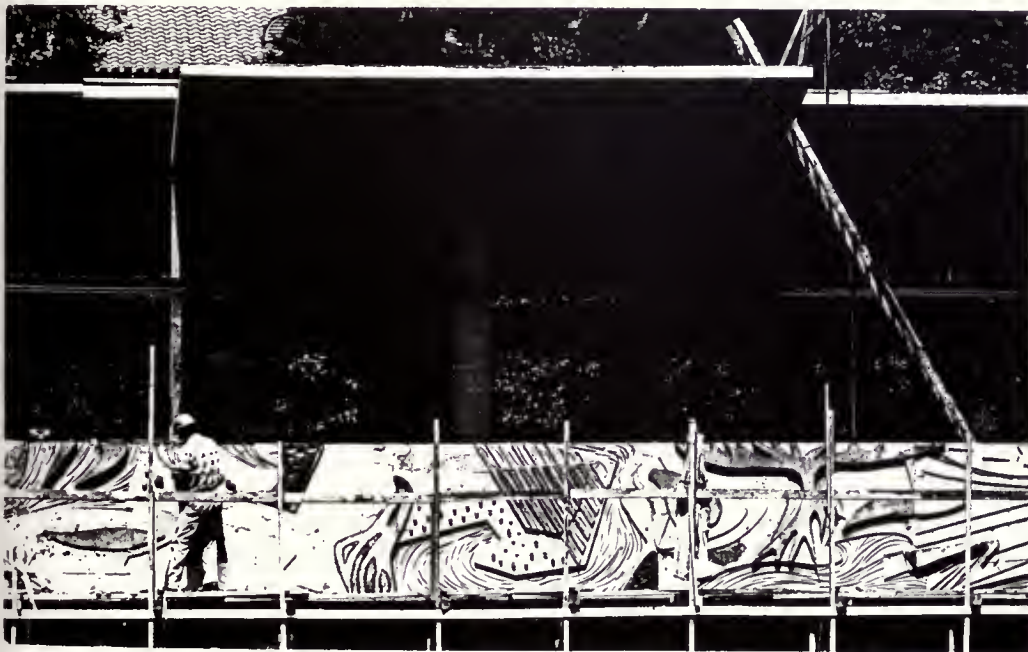
DeMars: We occasionally would get visits from the building committee, or the board of regents. Sometimes only the chairman would come down. This was Don McLaughlin. We were a little resentful in a way, and yet I thought he was really very nice about the way he would propose things. He was saying, "You know, why can't we ever have arches anymore?" He was thinking of Eshleman, because the other buildings were going. He said, "There's a graciousness to an arch, and I miss it. Couldn't the top of this be arched?"

I said, "I suppose we feel that unless it structurally is needed, it's really not the shape that concrete requires, and it'll be a concrete building." (I was much more a purist at that time than I have gotten to be.)

The tops of the columns come up, and there's a loggia around the top of Eshleman where you can walk clear around it. But the actual structure is such that there are no interior columns. It's a very short span, and the girders go from one side to the other to hold the floors up. Well, when you get up to the top here, with a setback, you still had to have this girder go through. So we picked up the column to hold up the roof of the library part, which sets back.

I thought, "Well, it isn't so illogical to round the connection at the top of the columns to the continuous beam that runs around the whole thing, and it sort of makes a little softening of that." Actually, structurally, it really is good engineering. So there's that little bit of rounding there, and it does help, instead of being just a plain thing.

Riess: Good. Well, we'll think of that as a McLaughlin memorial.



Emmy Lou Packard designed the bas relief frieze for the south-facing parapet of the Student Center Dining Commons. Her subject was land, sea, and sky forms of California. In the photograph [Rondal Partridge, 1960] Packard is placing potatoes, radishes, puffed wheat, etc., on the Celotex form, which translate into textures in reverse-casting of the 5' by 85' relief. Photographs include DeMars, Packard, and Don Reay.

DeMars: And there's another thing. He thought the ends looked awfully blank. Well, as a matter of fact, they do. There was a window at the end of the hallway on both ends of the building. He said, "Couldn't there be balconies or something?" "Well, you don't need a balcony. It isn't a fire escape." I go through my arguments. Then I thought, "Well, maybe it could have a balcony." So we added a balcony, and the balcony makes all the difference in the world. I think the end of the building is quite decent.

Riess: That's very interesting, and nice that you included that sort of tribute to McLaughlin.

DeMars: Well, in fact, we had one further one that comes along when we get into Zellerbach, but we'll wait to get into that.

But on Eshleman what happened was that Don Hardison's office did the working drawings. I was not excluded, as you see, from having some input into some of the aesthetics of the building. This was accepted. What I really wish was that on the north side we had used the vertical fins that we have on the south side that hold up the sunshade lid over the windows, and that makes that pattern on Bancroft.

Zellerbach Hall

London Theater Conference, 1961

Riess: Let's get into Zellerbach.

DeMars: All right. So, it was agreed. Eshleman got underway, and it appeared that we were going to get the job to do the auditorium theater. When I made the trip to England in June of 1961 this was in anticipation of the input. We must have learned early in '61 that we were to do the theater.

Riess: This was the trip to the London theater conference?

DeMars: Right. What happened was I don't even think that it was funded yet, but if it ever got funded, we would be the architects. So we talked them into providing some modest funds to start planning with the theater committee and with any other committees that had input into the planning of the building, and to review their reaction to the competition drawings and so forth, because that was the basis of the thing.

It was settled as roughly a two thousand seat, multi-purpose hall, and an experimental theater for five hundred seats or so. They would share certain facilities. I don't even recall that the program spelled these out in detail. In other words, these things need to be supported by all kinds of things. So we started working on this.

Riess: The committee was Travis Bogard and Henry May?

DeMars: Yes, and Fred Harris. Incidentally, the Green Room of the theater was finally named after Fred Harris.

Riess: How about Garff Wilson? Did he have anything to do with it?

DeMars: Garff Wilson I don't recall being on the committee. He may have been. I don't think he had a real input into the design or into the programming.

What happened was, we started working a bit on that, and then I heard about this conference to be held in London, sponsored by the International Institute of Theater Technicians. Conference of International Association of Theater Technicians, it's called, and I made a bid to the Ford Foundation to make me a little grant to attend the meeting, and so they advanced me a thousand bucks. I was going to get two thousand bucks to cover it. So I went. This was in June.

Riess: The University wouldn't send you on that one?

DeMars: Well, I don't know. I don't suppose they had--no. [laughter] I guess they wouldn't and didn't.

Riess: Did you have to do a report for them?

DeMars: Yes. And this is the report, and they never paid me my second thousand dollars, because they thought the report sounded like "What I did in my Summer Vacation," which I thought was a little insulting! [laughter]

Riess: They got a lot for their thousand dollars, it seems to me, anyway.

DeMars: The subject matter of the conference was adaptable theater, and in fact the whole program was adaptable theater in our case. The big theater was supposed to be adaptable to drama, music, dance, ballet, and so forth. The second theater was to be primarily for a laboratory for the drama department.

One of the problems, particularly as it went on with this committee, was the spelling out of requirements acoustically for

the big hall. They wanted it primarily for the trained spoken word--in other words, for drama at a big scale and not just for student amateurs, unless they were capable of speaking in the hall without amplification. Now, you can do that, but there have been not more than about two events that I can think of. After it was built, we had one visiting company from England that did *Hamlet* on the big stage, with a very prominent British star, and they brought their own grave.

Riess: But you're saying that mostly the big stage is used for musical and dance events.

DeMars: Yes. In fact, the acoustical engineers said, "Well, a hall like this is going to be used a great deal for music."

Riess: So they tuned it for music.

DeMars: They tuned it toward it, but it's still a bit of a compromise in the way they did it, toward the voice, you see. Of course the two just pull in opposite directions; the more you make it useful for voice, the more you cut down on the reverberation time.

The conference was talking about exactly all these same problems. Also, there's a nice schism. They had examples of both sorts of things there, a hall where you could change the seating, you could modify the acoustical dimensions of it and so forth. Then they had examples of others where it was mostly proscenium. One of the people said, "The most adaptable form of all is the proscenium form, because you can modify that so that it can work for the other." The more you try to wrap the audience around, and so forth, the less you can adapt it the other way.

Actually the playhouse can be adapted to all the possible forms, from a standard proscenium to a complete arena, and has been so used. This is because it is small and can vary from four hundred to seven hundred seats. And this is because it doesn't have to survive on the income from ticket sales!

Seating and Acoustic Consultants

DeMars: I had been in Europe in '52 and '55. The opera houses in Germany had been bombed, and in '52 the ruins were there, and I saw some of them at the time. But by '61, most of the cities running down through the middle of Germany had their opera houses rebuilt--at government expense. I saw a dozen or more of the major halls, spending a day or so in each one, and went on down, ending up at

Bayreuth. I came home from that and wrote my piece, from which I got that report. (I guess that's already mentioned here. I read it over recently again. I thought I dealt with it reasonably well for them.)

But anyway, this trip did have some solid input into both halls. We went through plans A-B-C-D-E-F-G, and I think to G-3, changes in plans for the large hall, the two thousand seat concert hall. And the drama department's playhouse went through considerable changes from the competition plan.

Riess: You and your committee went through that many changes?

DeMars: Yes, and at one point I went east to get a theater consultant. I went to New York and talked to Philip Johnson, who was a longtime friend of mine, and asked him who would be the consultant to get. He said, on this occasion, "The best theater consultant is in the next room right now, conferring with my staff." So he introduced me to Ben Schlanger, and we talked about it a bit.

Shortly thereafter, I proposed to the committee that it would be useful to have Ben Schlanger come out at that stage because his expertise was in seating and sightlines and so forth. He did come out.

Riess: We've talked about this before, but I don't think on tape. In any event, isn't he the one who said you should narrow down the seating?

DeMars: Narrow it down and make a second balcony, yes. And his office introduced us to the fact that theater seats are of different widths, from nineteen inches to twenty-two inches, and by the way you juggle these back and forth, you can make it possible for people to look through, between the heads of the people sitting in the first row in front and look over the heads of the people in the second row. So that's the way it's done there.

And they don't make the seats any wider because they don't want people to have too big a place, or they'll be shifting around, you see. They want to hold them in that place. So typically, you have one armrest. But if you need a little more room, more than twenty-two inches, you actually have two armrests, an armrest on the second chair, in other words, and then you separate them. There are places there where they are separated as much as four inches or so, to get this effect. It's a peculiar thing, but it apparently works.

So anyway, the theater project got underway.

Riess: He looked at your plans in New York, or did he come out?

DeMars: Well, he actually came out. The discussions of the plans were held here, and these are the couple of things that he said to do. The seating and sightline thing they did from the plans that we sent them. [pause]

DeMars: Did I mention discussing this project with Bob Newman of Bolt, Baraneck & Newman, the acoustical consultants, at a certain point? They did Lincoln Center, the symphony hall there, and they've done dozens of halls here and in South America, as acoustical engineers, and finally were the engineers on Davies Hall in San Francisco. (I'll get into that one a little bit later.)

Their black mark is the fact that the symphony hall at Lincoln Center had to be remodeled twice and finally torn out. They gutted it and did it over again, and got Philip Johnson to do the actual architectural interior completely totally differently. They had so much experience, I felt that if they made a mistake or two, they should have learned by them.

Riess: So were they successful?

DeMars: Well, we didn't have them for Zellerbach, but I knew Bob Newman. He was a student at MIT when I was there, but he was actually in my class, learning to be an architect. Dick Bolt was an architect, a graduate from Cal, who then went into physics and all of this kind of thing. I think he has an advanced degree in physics, which led him into the whole business of an interest in acoustics, which was, I might say, in the kindergarten stages of expertise in those days. So here was this firm already operating.

Bob Newman, who was a physicist, and already the "N" of BBN, was going around talking to architects, and BBN felt he ought to be an architect as well. So he goes to MIT and gets his degree in architecture as a graduate degree. He was one of the best students in my class, and I felt that he had a real feeling for the architectural solutions to problems when they were stated. When I saw him at an occasion in the east, and I said, "Bob, we're going to do this theater," he was interested in more ways than one. [chuckles] Also, I think, perhaps the acoustical engineers were.

But in the architectural approach I said, "I don't want to just do one of these things with blank side walls that you paint black, on the thesis that the audience is just there to see that act, and so forth. It seems to me that the theaters that one likes have some architecture on the inside as well."

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DeMars: He said, "If you can create a modern version of the modeling that goes on in the Baroque opera houses and symphony halls--balconies, sculpture, angels and cupids and wreaths, all at bold scale--." And it turns out it is the things that are happening on the side walls that give them their good acoustical diffusion of sound.

Also, you need rather large volumes for the number of seats, and the space is large because every seat means that much more absorbent material. People are the worst offenders as far as absorbing the sound and deadening the reverberation--the liveness of the hall--and so you have to accommodate that. All of the surfaces that you possibly can should be hard. Then, also, the deep balconies and so forth are what diffuse the sound and spread it around. It needs to be a rather large scale.

He said, "This is why you see in some of the new halls these large, round disk-shaped things, and even small ones, on the side walls. I call them acoustitits." [chuckles] He didn't like them all that well, as you can see. He said, "If you can find more reason to bring the balconies down on the side walls and so forth, that's all to the good. It needs to be a rather bold scale, because this is to reflect the lower frequencies. It needs to be three, four, five feet dimensions and rounded and so forth. Little swags and small decoration doesn't have any effect one way or the other."

Riess: Did he actually put pencil to paper at all when he was talking about this?

DeMars: No, but the impression I got from the discussion was that the modeling of the side walls should start very boldly near the source of sound, and then, as it gets farther and farther back, it can begin to flatten out a bit. It needn't be quite as bold, because you would be breaking the sound up, diffusing it at the source, but as it gets farther away it simply needs to be contained and reflected back to the audience.

Riess: You're talking an awful lot about "it." Are you talking about the sculptural boxes with color behind them on the walls of Zellerbach Hall? This is what we're talking about, isn't it?

DeMars: Yes, it is, of course. I should have described it a bit more.

The Model, and the Interior Forms and Lighting

DeMars: When we really got into that, we did this all on a model, at quite a large scale. I had made a trip on some occasion to Houston. A firm there who were doing the new symphony hall for Houston, they had a half model, quite a large scale, of the interior, with the ceiling, and the walls, and the floor, and everything. This was on a high table which they could then roll up against a large mirror. There was a hole in the floor and you could take a section out, and you could sit on a little stenographer's stool and roll yourself under it, stick your head up through the hole in the floor, look around, and see what the whole hall looked like, you see.

So we decided to do the same thing. We built the table a little over, I'd say, five feet high. Our model is a little smaller than theirs was, in cardboard. We made a hole in the floor. You could lift the section out.

Riess: This was on Center Street, in your office?

DeMars: In our office there, yes. We had one special room with enough space for two desks, the model, and the mirror, and all that. We had two draftsmen in there working on this, Tom Aidala and Ralph Panecaldo that we mentioned earlier.

We found that by looking through one of the side exits we saw the whole interior as you would if you were sitting there. You're too close when your head is in the middle of the lower floor to this thing, but looking from the side--. We took photos through it. A number of the things really look almost more convincing than the real hall does.

In order to light it, when it was against this mirror, we pulled the ceiling out a bit from the side walls and we had one of these architect lamps--you know, the typical desk lamp--over the top of the model. It sort of leaked through. The little holes we had for the ceiling lights weren't enough. But spilling down the side walls, it made a marvelous effect. That led directly into our doing it in the final version. Then we tried putting color behind. I had Kodachromes of the model, which look really quite convincing. I'll show them to you, some other time.

Riess: Were each of those forms on the side walls very carefully worked out, or were they just random shapes?

DeMars: Oh, they weren't calculated or anything, but it was worked on as a piece of sculpture, in cardboard, exactly as it was finally to

look. In the composition of it we were trying to lace it in with the seating plans, for instance, that it was a continuation of this balcony. The first balcony, its shapes continue right on down the side walls to the stage. At the end of each row there's a little stepback. That's kind of a breakup of the form of that balcony front, but it also ties it in to the form. I think I may have mentioned that this was a thing that I saw in Sweden, in Malmö.

Riess: Would you say, in fact, that this was an influenced interior? Aalto has done many interiors.

DeMars: Well, I didn't find any of Aalto's interiors doing what--I think the Malmö Theater was much more the influence on the whole theater, and outside as well. [phone rings] Pardon me.

Retuning and Fine Tuning, 1968

Riess: So you were able to check the acoustic qualities.

DeMars: Yes, and there are two stories on that one. [laughs] (I'm just backtracking a little bit here.)

Baraneck, of this firm in New York--I mentioned him earlier--wrote a book after they did Lincoln Center. He did the same thing, sort of, that I did. He got a grant from somebody and made a worldwide trip, studying sixty symphony halls in South America and all over Europe, and from this made a total analysis of the good points of these halls. Each one is shown in drawings, and a photo, and he talked to consultants--directors who directed orchestras--and got their opinions. We had all of this to study. He also had a whole page of the acoustical tests, the reverberation time and all of the stuff that goes into this.

Then they have a tuning, and in Lincoln Center they actually had things made out of styrofoam which were tested to have the same absorption quality as people. These were placed in the seats, and there are pictures of it in his book. This was sort of after the fact, but to test it out. The tests were considered, by him, satisfactory or not.

All the principles he talked about in the book, presumably, were placed in the design of Lincoln Center, the symphony hall there. But the critics--and I think there are pictures of Leonard Bernstein sitting in the rows and so forth--I don't know what got off on the wrong track, but it got thoroughly panned. It was not

liked, and then they went through about three different modifications trying to correct it. Finally it was decided that it was uncorrectable, and they tore it out completely--the balconies, the steel work, everything--and started over again.

Most places have some funds in there to tune the hall afterwards, adjust it and see what's needed. Well, this wasn't included in ours, so we had to wait for the complaints. We did get a few. They were not serious, but one of them was Alexander Fried, who wrote afterwards that "it has a certain quality, but there was something missing. We wouldn't say it was dead, but it didn't have a thrilling response." He was being very nice. I don't think it was even a year after the hall had opened in '68 that we went to the Zellerbach family and got, I think it was, seventy-five thousand to test it and then to see what could be done.

Riess: But it was after it was completed.

DeMars: After it was completed, and after it had been used for a while.

Riess: I had asked if it was possible to test it ahead of time, and you said yes, but this is not ahead of time.

DeMars: Oh, well, they test it theoretically by the drawings and so forth.

Riess: You were talking about the model, Was it possible to model sound?

DeMars: Well, you can't test this little model. Our model was about thirty inches high interior, and about four feet long, including the stage and all. We included all of that. It was made of cardboard, and you couldn't have tested that, but they do test now, and I think it was in Australia they actually made a model ten feet inside, interior, and they tested it with lights. They get the reflections by shooting light beams around and seeing where the lights reflected. They're trying to anticipate things a bit more.

In our case they did things like shoot off a pistol and then record the sound as it decayed. Another one was to pop balloons in different positions. And they set up a disk thing on the orchestra level, facing the side wall, and then made one of these large sounds to see what kind of a response they got into that disk--recorded, again, on its decay. They test out different parts of the hall and so on.

Riess: How did you correct it?

DeMars: Well, they found that the reverberation time for music, symphony, and so forth, was not as long as it should be--we're talking about tenths of a second.

When the plan was being developed, we had a visit by the board of regents. This was with the chairman of the board, and Clark Kerr was among them and so forth. They were seeing the plan down in our office as it developed, and Clark Kerr said, "Who are you thinking of having for your acoustical engineer?" We said we hadn't decided yet. We were, of course, thinking of some of the prominent ones, but we simply hadn't decided. "Well," he said, "I think the regents would not look with disfavor on your careful consideration of Vern Knudsen."

Vern Knudsen was at that time the chancellor of UCLA, but beyond that he was also considered almost the granddaddy of acoustical studies, testing, and so forth. The Celotex Company, at a very early time when architects were beginning to think about other kinds of buildings, other situations than concert halls, had him do a pamphlet which became the sort of standard thing which architects used.

He had perfectly good credentials, but we were also concerned with the fact that he was in Los Angeles. We had an acoustical engineer on our faculty, and we had used him a couple of times. He didn't have the fame that Knudsen had--this was Walter Soroka. Well, it turns out that Soroka was a student of Knudsen's. So somehow we were able to concoct a situation where they jointly would be our acoustical firm, with Knudsen as the prime one. But when we had little details and things, here was somebody right at hand that we could lean on.

Riess: Was that surprising for Kerr to make that direct suggestion?

DeMars: I don't know, but I remember the wording almost exactly.

Well, then what happened, they made these tests. They found that the reverberation time was several tenths of a second short of what they had hoped to have. They took out a couple of seats and tested the seat for its absorption. The seats have padding in them, and typically the seat is supposed to compensate for the fact that there's no person sitting in them when they're having rehearsals, so that when you rehearse with an empty hall, it wouldn't mislead you into thinking it's going to sound glorious, and when the audience gets there, it doesn't. But they found it tested much shorter.

So we wrote to the firm that did the seats, and we just said that it didn't meet the specifications. They said, "Ah! It not

only meets the specifications, it really is much more absorbent than you've called for." "Wow," we said, "That's the problem." The next thing, they and their attorney and so forth fly out to meet with us. We had a meeting in our office, talking about the thing.

"Well, what would Soroka propose?" He said, "Take the covers off the seats and put a layer about an eighth of an inch thick of plastic over the interior padding, which will stop the absorption on the seat back." And these guys are thinking, "Two thousand seats! My God!" They were beginning to be nervous about it. "Is there anything else?"

Soroka says, "Well, as a matter of fact, if you took the padding up from under the carpets in the aisles, that would make as much difference as the seating."

"We'll buy it." [laughs]

So they paid for taking all the carpeting up. We tested a little section to see if anyone could tell the difference underfoot, and you couldn't, it seemed just the same. And there was really sufficient area in the main aisles. There isn't any carpeting in the rows of seats, because, again, they don't want that extra absorption. The walls are dashed with a kind of stucco which people sometimes think is acoustical plaster, but it's not. It's a hard plaster, so all the wall surfaces are hard in the big hall. There's no built-in acoustical absorption except for the seating and what little comes in the curtains, and in the carpeting, sans padding.

Riess: That's interesting.

DeMars: Oh, one other thing we found. On the side walls, which are supposed to be reflecting the sound, there were specifications for the thickness of plaster, and of course the ceiling. In fact, the big ceiling is almost supposed to suggest, the way it swoops down, a great canvas awning, and this is an outdoor theater, and the light is coming through on the side walls, which helps model the sculptural effect of the side walls.

But to be sure there would be no absorption of vibration in the ceiling, Soroka specified the ceiling must be an inch and a half thick. Typical plaster in a plaster wall is three-quarters of an inch. That's one coat. The only way to get it that thick is to have two coats of plaster. When we got into it, the contractor tried to talk us into a single thicker coat. But, "No, it has to be a second coat." We stuck to our guns on that. All the ceiling elements are an inch and a half thick.

The side walls, which have places where these lights are, you can get behind them and look through. You have to get up there and walk through them to change lights. We could see that in places you could at times see little bits of light coming through the plaster, it was so thin. We discovered there were places where the plaster was not much more than enough to cover the lath about a quarter of an inch thick or so. So they got in and gunnited it from the inside--that is, spraying on plaster.

There are certain parts where the wall is furred out in the back of the hall, where some of the big pieces of wall, if you pounded on them they would sort of go "boom, boom, boom." Our understanding is that if it can make that sound, it will absorb that sound. In other words, the deep booms of drums and things would simply get absorbed, wouldn't be reflected out. So we punched holes in that and pumped a foaming plaster behind these pieces to solidify that.

The following year, when the Juilliard Quartet came back--and no one had told anybody that this had been done--they found a greater rapport with the audience. They asked had anything been done in this time? There's a very nice letter in the files saying that they found greater response and greater warmth in the hall, in the new situation.

Riess: And the critics?

DeMars: Apparently they feel better about it now, yes. There are even a couple of little things we won't go into now, but we may still do them.

Soundproofing: The Hall and the Playhouse

DeMars: There's one other little item as a detail. It's kind of interesting acoustically, and you wouldn't think about it. One of the problems, very often, is not merely the quality of the sound but the cutting off of sound from unwanted outside noises. Now, if you have a workshop attached to a theater, and they're sawing wood in there with a buzz saw or something [chuckles], this not only makes a sound in the air, but it actually telegraphs through the floor. If there were a very quiet violin solo or dead silence in a concert hall, and someone was running a saw in a workshop, which was only one wall removed, particularly if there were doorways into that--.

The playhouse, which is the drama department's smaller theater, backs against the big theater. It was understood that they would be using dressing rooms and that the workshop would be jointly for both, because it would give access to both sides. It was decided that for any openings between these two there would always be three doors. There were some huge doors at the back of the main stage of Zellerbach. They are eighteen feet high and twelve feet wide, and they cost a small fortune. The first one at Zellerbach is the most expensive, with rubber gaskets all around the sides. Then there are two more doors before you get into the workshop, the same way as you get into the small theater.

Even though the two buildings are back against each other, and there are passageways or hallways between, so that there is no direct room right behind the big theater, these also make it possible to get around. If you're on one side of the stage and you're supposed to be, in the next act, on the other side, you don't have to work your way behind the scenery. You can actually hop into the hall, cross over, and come back. That's one of the sound barriers.

Also, the actual floors of those passageways are cantilevered from the second building--in other words, they don't attach to the main building. They're separated by about two inches. Then there's a little aluminum plate over that. Can you visualize this?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: We didn't do it between the workshop and the playhouse. We felt that in the playhouse they could know they are not supposed to work that night in the workshop. But on the big hall, we wanted them to be completely independent. This is very important.

It has turned out that we have never had any complaint at all. These two--there's a total, complete, different administration of the two halls. The things going on may be a violin solo in the concert hall, and they may be having a play in which somebody's getting shot over in the playhouse. They don't have to give that too much consideration.

Riess: These were things that the committee thought through ahead of time?

DeMars: Not really, except they wanted certain things to be possible functionally. The detailing of the acoustical matters came sort of along when it really got into the development drawings.

San Francisco Performing Arts Center. Plan and Conceptual Design

Meeting the Right People: Alioto, Hale, Boone, and Zellerbach

Riess: I'm wondering how you got involved with the Performing Arts Center. Did you meet Zellerbach first?

DeMars: I didn't meet Zellerbach first. The person I met was Mayor Alioto, and that came about through Jack Tolan. I've mentioned Jack. He and Alioto were having a luncheon at the law school. And this was about the time when Zellerbach Hall was nearing completion.

Jack called me up about it. He said, "Will you meet us? I would like to give the Mayor a tour of the hall. I think he should see it." It was just a few weeks before the opening, so the building was pretty well advanced. And probably this was a week or two before we gave Zellerbach a tour, which was when I first met Zellerbach.

At that time Jack Tolan was Alioto's deputy for development. In other words, he was a consultant on all kinds of projects the city was involved in. When he [Jack] suggested I invite Alioto to the grand opening, I think I already had been planning to invite Jack and his wife. Jack said, "I think the Mayor and his wife would be delighted to come." So the Aliotos were invited. We got them good seats in the tiers, and we gave them the grand tour.

There was a grand brouhaha and gala with [Igor] Stravinsky, and Gregory Peck introducing--Gregory Peck was a graduate of the drama department here. Stravinsky was there for several performances, and on this first night it was quite a thrill to have him. It was an all-Stravinsky program, with a marvelous production of "L'Histoire du Soldat," sets by Henry May. In fact, Stravinsky afterwards said that was the best production of "L'Histoire" that he had ever seen.

Henry really gave it the full blast. There was an act curtain, which only the Diaghilev company would do, a special curtain painted for the act, and then he had three scenes that dropped down for different parts. It was really done very well.

Well, after that evening's presentation Alioto said, "Isn't this good enough? Why does San Francisco need anything more than this for their new symphony hall?"

Riess: The San Francisco symphony hall was already under discussion then?

DeMars: It was under discussion, apparently, although it wasn't known to me that it was. Then Jack said, "Alioto would like to talk to you. Can you come over at such-and-such a time?" I came over, and he talked about it. He said that San Francisco is planning a new performing arts center, and he said, "I think that Zellerbach Hall is quite good enough. It might have to be a little bigger, whatever, but it seems to me that does everything we need for it," and so forth.

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DeMars: Then he gave me the names of some people I'd be hearing from. There was Philip Boone, president of the Symphony Association, Prentice Cobb Hale, representing the opera, and Harold Zellerbach, chairman of the Arts Commission. Shortly afterwards I heard from Mr. Zellerbach that we were to meet at Jack's Restaurant. I don't think before this that Alioto said, "They're going to offer you the job." I guess he felt that was not his role.

Riess: Do you know whether they had a number of other architects they had been talking with?

DeMars: At one time they had talked with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, because some ten years earlier, about, they had made a proposal for it. I'll show you this afterwards. I have their sketch, which I'll tell you about. In fact, I think at some point I knew about this earlier proposal.

Anyway, we met at Jack's with Zellerbach, Hale, and Philip Boone. We had a pleasant luncheon, and then, "They would like us now to be--" Well, how did they put it? They didn't have the funding. They needed to make studies, and Mr. Zellerbach had recommended us highly. They would like to retain us to make studies for the hall.

Riess: What were they calling it at that point--a symphony hall or a performing arts center?

DeMars: It was called the Performing Arts Center. I don't know why, because it really isn't. You could say that the complex at the Civic Center is a performing arts center, but, anyway, that was what, as you noticed, it was called there.

We started off working on it, and we started from--I think they had some of the drawings from Skidmore. One note here: I said we understood that Skidmore had made this study before. I said we were curious why they are not still retained. Hale--I

can't remember his words--but Hale was involved in the Olympic Games in Squaw Valley, and Skidmore had done I-don't-know-which of the buildings. Apparently they had a run-in of some sort. There may have been some other occasion as well, but Hale was really rather negative about them. Maybe Skidmore was going to charge them more than we were, though we didn't even discuss that. We would be paid on a cost basis for our time. I'm sure we discussed this along the way.

The organization had been started, and they wanted to get underway with making studies, what would fit on that site, and which would the site be, and it was all of this.

Riess: Which site did they know they had?

DeMars: The site behind the Opera House and the Veteran's Building was reserved for them. Not the entire two-block area, because the only other building of consequence on the site was the law building, the state bar. The state bar was planning to make an addition to their building. I knew the architects from it, and we worked together, as we developed our scheme, and they modified their scheme considerably to compose with it and make the whole thing seem to be part of a consistent design on that block. Of course, it didn't quite come off.

Site Studies, Shot Down

DeMars: What happened--well, we saw the Skidmore drawings and so forth. And they were planning to have the hall across Franklin Street. That was the only site reserved for it. Then they were going to make a continuation of the little memorial court that now exists between the Veteran's Building and the Opera House, and they were going to continue that across. Then it would be a setting for the beginning of the new symphony hall. They would carry a kind of an arcade on both sides of it, and the street would dip down and go under all that and then come up the other side. This plaza would be the width that would be between the two buildings. That width would be the entire plaza.

We thought that was a nice idea, but I don't know where we first learned that there was a major sewer or whether we were the first ones to find it out, running down Franklin Street. Sewers don't dip down and come up the other side. They're all gravity, as far I know. Oh, you have a pumping plant, this is possible, but, anyway, we saw no reason why you couldn't carry the concept forward and have the plaza raised, so the street would go through

under. Then from this raised plaza you would, again, have sort of side elements such as they had.

They were going to carry the arcades of the arches that run the side of the Opera House and the other as a motif. They would then pick up that motif again and carry it down. This was Skidmore's scheme. Then, very un-Skidmore-ish, their building was going to be in the same French Renaissance architecture as the Opera House.

Riess: Do you know who at Skidmore was particularly involved?

DeMars: I don't know, and I should find out sometime, just to clarify the issue.

It would have been very lovely, but anyway, the first question was could you get all this stuff on the site that they wanted? It would have to be around three thousand seats or so. Then, there needed to be a rehearsal facility for the symphony big enough that would have some acoustical qualities, and also for the opera. There were a number of opera things which would go in the building as well as the symphony.

We had an interesting parking solution. We proposed using air rights under, over and on parts of the freeway west of the site. There are two decks that start to take off from the freeway but were cut off and never completed. We found we could get a lot of parking on them coming off a structure that would be built up and around them. We went as far as talking to Caltrans in Sacramento about the air rights, and they were quite cooperative and receptive to the idea. We could have parked several hundred cars altogether.

Riess: Did you have to have the ballet space in there, too?

DeMars: There would be practice for the ballet and, I think, space for the school, which sort of went with it, and, of course, lobbies and restaurants and so forth.

Riess: You did a quite fabulous scheme. So, what happened?

DeMars: Well, what happened, it was rather popularly embraced by the War Memorial Board. And the chairman of that board, Fred Campagnoli, was also, I would say, rather enthusiastic about the concept and the scheme. He's an attorney. He had me meet with a group in North Beach for lunch to present the whole thing to them. He obviously was sort of selling the idea. So, it was going along.

Well, there were two apartment houses on the site. One of them was almost totally occupied by black families. Then there were a couple of other buildings on the site, one a sort of warehouse type on the south side of the site, that were not occupied. There were some arts groups in there, and there were a couple of black theater groups.

Riess: Ah, yes, here's the conflict.

DeMars: Now, the black families business--they had gotten this far that they were going to relocate the families. They had quite a nice additional sum of money. and my recollection was that they were all enthusiastic about moving. I forget the second building, but whatever it was, there was a lot of hue and cry about this kind of thing, you see, the need for the little people having their places. Just to, offhand, throw them out to make it available to the elite and so forth! It was something they had to approach very, very carefully, you see, if it were going to involve city funds or even going to be done at all, even to raise the funds.

Bringing in Belluschi

DeMars: Another little story: the AIA was having a major convention in San Francisco, one of their yearly conventions. Pietro Belluschi was among the speakers. It was being held in the Opera House. I had been planning to propose him as a consultant on the hall, because I knew him from before MIT. I knew him when I was in the National Housing Agency in Washington.

Riess: He's done a lot of theaters.

DeMars: He's done theaters, and, not incidentally, he was on the jury for the student center. In fact, he's everyone's favorite juror. He was a consultant to Perini on the Golden Gateway. I guess we had already used him on the Golden Gateway and then on Santa Monica. We proposed that he be our consultant on that. In each case he came through, at a certain point, cutting the Gordian knot when it was all tangled up.

Riess: What was he able to do in San Francisco?

DeMars: Well, in San Francisco, he was--[chuckles]--I'll tell you what he was able to do.

Anyway, after this meeting of the AIA I waylaid him and took him out on the sidewalk. I said, "I want you to see something

here." We walked out, facing the city hall, and I said, "Now, I want you to turn around, and I want you to look down this little memorial courtyard here. We're going to do a symphony hall right there at the end of it, across the street from that, which will look right on the hall. We want you to be the consultant." He just said, "Wow!" This isn't the first time he's been a consultant in anything, but he was really enthusiastic about the thing.

When we proposed this to the board it was getting along far enough that they were going to have to make some decisions about architects pretty soon. I really felt that with our modest office over here, twenty draftsmen--well, the draftsmen were enough to handle Zellerbach Hall--I felt that we needed a presence in San Francisco. So I proposed Belluschi to the Sponsors of the Performing Art Center.

By this time Sam Stewart had been made chairman of the sponsors group, and we were actually being interviewed for a more permanent commitment--not the permanent, but a. I didn't realize what a stroke proposing Belluschi had been, because Sam Stewart had been the head of the building board for building the Bank of America building when he was CEO of that. Belluschi was the prime consultant on it. In fact, the building was first given to Wurster's office, and they brought Belluschi in. Wurster felt that for this high-rise building they should have a firm that was more experienced in skyscraper construction. He felt between Belluschi and him confident enough to do it.

Riess: So Sam Stewart had a history with Belluschi.

DeMars: Sam Stewart apparently got along beautifully with Belluschi. In fact, they got along somehow with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. It's very interesting to talk after the fact with them. Skidmore says that they designed the building. Belluschi says he did, and Wurster's office says that they did. I'm talking about the Bank of America, sorry.

Stewart was delighted, because he apparently had gotten along very well with Belluschi and felt this gave him a sense of confidence and so forth in the thing. By this time, this little group we were meeting with--Mrs. Haas was in it, Zellerbach was on the committee, and so was Shorenstein, who took a more cautious view about the firm of DeMars & Wells. He was cordial but didn't let it overflow.

The Library Site

DeMars: Well, shortly after that this matter of the blacks' residency came up, how to deal with that problem, if they were starting to raise funds. And they just threw in the sponge on the whole deal. We weren't in on the discussions, but they just said, "We have to find another site."

I don't usually try to claim authorship for everything under the sun, but I think that I suggested the site on the other side of the city hall which flanks the library. That had originally been proposed for the Opera House and is the thing that's called Marshall Square because of the monument at the other end. It touches on Market Street, and it would be a building equal in volume, you might say, to the library building. That was enthusiastically embraced, and so we proceeded to see what we could do about that.

Lessons from European Music Houses

DeMars: It was then that the symphony had made a trip to Europe and played in London and several places, and they had written back that they had experienced the hall in Berlin and that this was marvelous. They were wrapped around by the audience, and they loved the whole thing about it. "We'd move in tomorrow," I think is the quote that was in the newspaper.

Well, that was a signal to us. What do we do? I think the hall in Berlin doesn't even seat two thousand. This was going to have to be three. In fact, three thousand was what they started with, and here's the symphony moving out of the Opera House where they can sell thirty-two hundred seats. They have a hard time raising money, so two hundred seats less is a consideration. Now they wanted thirty-two hundred.

Typically, the famous halls of the world are all under two thousand. They're fifteen hundred. The problems expand, because how do you fill this with natural sound and not have it absorbed by this main absorbent thing, the audience? You could have them wear bathing suits. That would be one thing to do. These are the kinds of jokes they make about it. But we started working a bit. I had plans from magazines of the Berlin hall. I think that's when I made a little model, to see what could you do to expand it to three thousand from about two thousand.

Riess: So Belluschi didn't have his hand in that first design?

DeMars: No, he really didn't.

Riess: Even though you had shown him where it was going to be.

DeMars: Yes. It must have been just about that time, you see, that the switch was being made. He was enthusiastic about the first thing. Anyway, then it turned out that he was to go to Italy. They were having a great exhibition of his work in Naples. He figured that we could combine this trip and go to Berlin. We could also pick up several other halls on the way. Since we would land in London, that was one new hall that we should see.

Scafidi was the head of the symphony, the business manager. He was able to lay out a nice little red carpet for us. We landed in London. What we wanted to do was to be able to talk to the technicians and the people who were in charge, and talk to the directors, if we could, of the orchestras, and then hear a concert there. Belluschi brought his wife along--this is his former secretary at MIT, quite a rather younger person than he--Marjorie Belluschi. It was a very nice trip. I don't think we had the royal box, but it was a pretty fancy box in London.

I had heard that London has enhanced reverberation time. We had heard about this, but we were able to talk to the manager of the symphony there. (I'll wind this up in a hurry.) What they do is, their microphones pick up the sound of the orchestra, and it's run through a long tube, or something, which delays the sound. Then it comes out of a little speaker on the ceiling in the area that they are trying to enhance the sound for. That delay--it has a strength, but it doesn't have the decay that it would have. They have done this in some cathedrals, too. To just put speakers in there, you could hear the priest down here at one end, and with all these echoes, all you hear is the sound waves down here loud enough to muffle. By the time you get it, you can't understand it.

Riess: But you do not call it a microphone?

DeMars: Well, yes, a microphone is involved, but the sound must be delayed and then amplified again for the more distant parts of the audience. Anyway, I may have gotten some of my technology mixed up, but it's called "enhanced acoustical reverberation." This manager said, "We don't make a point of this, and unless a director who's playing here asks about it, we don't tell him." They may even adjust it if it's an all-Wagner program or an all-Mozart. They can do this.

I'll just mention the other halls we went to. We went to Rotterdam and Amsterdam and then to Berlin. We went to Amsterdam first. In Rotterdam, [Edo] DeWaart was then the conductor and director. We met him during the intermission, and I ventured to say, "There's a rumor that you may be coming to San Francisco." He said, "Well, yes, maybe we were considering it," or something. But he was very helpful. He set us up the next day with a lot of the different people that run the house and so forth, where we could talk. We met with them over lunch and had a couple of hours.

We did this the same way in each place, and so it was really very useful. We had a tour through the whole facility, to see all of the green rooms, and the rooms where the orchestra meets, their lockers, and the music libraries--a very important part of the thing. This place in Berlin had not only restaurants for the audience, but there were restaurants for the orchestra, kind of a cafeteria thing in the back where they could be together and have lunch.

Riess: Were you able to come away with actual drawings from those places?

DeMars: We usually did, yes. We had drawings. The last place we went was in Naples. We went to the opera house there, which was the oldest. This was the San Carlo Opera. In fact, it was also the opening of the off-season.

Riess: The other places were mostly new halls?

DeMars: Except for the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Riess: In the new ones could you look at the architect's drawings?

DeMars: I don't think we went away with the architect's blueprints, but they often had reduced-scale things for them. We made some notes and so forth.

Riess: So this is a kind of courtesy that architects practice?

DeMars: Yes. We've done the same thing with Zellerbach. It's been reviewed several times by people doing new halls. It has a pretty good reputation.

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Riess: So you came back, and you did what?

DeMars: Further work. At some point there, we needed to hire the acoustical engineers. The men we were dealing with--Sam Stewart

was the main fundraiser, but Belford Brown was sort of executive director, I guess, of the Sponsors of the Performing Arts. He had been one that we reported to through all that.

Incidentally, I didn't mention that the main reason for us putting this together on the first site and so forth was what it was going to cost. I mean, how do find out what that's going to cost, so that you multiply it by square footages and so forth? What we did on the first site: we thought, well, if it's going to cost like Zellerbach Hall, but they're going to demand some marble and so forth, then whereas Zellerbach hall cost fifty dollars a square foot, let's call it sixty dollars a square foot. This kind of thing.

Then, of course, there's the ENR. Do you know about the ENR? The Engineering News Record? They give a constant--just like the stock exchange, they give almost a daily account on the inflation of building costs. So you're constantly using this ENR factor of what percentage it has gone up, you see. We were just amazed, and all these people should know it, but after a short time, when Zellerbach Hall cost about seven million, you see--well, we were saying that this is going to cost at least ten million, maybe more like twelve. That was at the beginning. Then we come in, and well, it seems to be costing about fifteen. Well, eighteen. "It cannot cost a penny over twenty million," pounding the table and so forth. "You've been told it can't cost more."

Riess: This is Belford Brown?

DeMars: Brown interpreting, and some of the others were telling us this. But then three months go by, and now it's a bit more. You know, it ended up--I think it cost forty or fifty million, maybe more. We weren't doing anything other than taking the figures and using the escalation figure that was coming out, and this was what was happening with inflation. So, anyway, when we got back the big issue was moving on further with the thing.

Riess: You were still on a consulting basis?

DeMars: Yes.

Problems: Costs, and Reactions to Site Plans from Friends of the Library

DeMars: Then the library people caught wind of the fact that this was about to happen on "their site," which they considered it. They

claimed that it had been reserved for a new library. This threw it into a tailspin for a bit, and a public hearing was held.

Kevin Starr was then the librarian for the city, with his Irish intensity. He really swayed the crowd completely. I think the meeting was before the planning commission, and the planning commission, it seems to me, voted for doing it on this site, even though they [Friends of the Library] made this very impressive plea for it. There was another meeting in which it was up to the mayor. The mayor said he had weighed all of the considerations, and he was much in favor of the library's position, but he really felt this was more persuasive. However he said it, his decision was that he had to agree that the site would be best for the symphony hall.

Riess: And then what happened?

DeMars: And then there was a big public hearing in the supervisors' room. (These other hearings were smaller.) They had the people turning out in mobs, with a heart over the words: "Friends of the Library," and so forth. Here were the elite trying to keep the little people from having their library and so forth. But I think that was less of it than the fact that--is it Mrs. Stern? There's a Mrs. Stern who was considered a very powerful mover-and-shaker. She moved and shook enough [chuckles] that they got it turned around.

So where can they go? There were several things--I don't know who proposed them first. There was no other site around there, and if they wanted it in that area, then what had been a big parking lot, where the football field or something had been, was the obvious site. I didn't know whether that was available by the school or whatever. Whoever said it first, I don't know. I may have.

Riess: Did you do a design for that site?

DeMars: Yes, and we started working on that with Belluschi. He would go home up to Oregon and [looking for pictures] there are a couple of pictures over here, just to raise in your mind a couple of questions. [pause]

DeMars: We actually had a couple of meetings with the acoustical engineers. Bob Newman flew out from the East Coast and met Belluschi and me in Belluschi's house in Portland to discuss them being the acoustical engineers. Of course, we raised this question about the fiasco--everyone you talk to knows about the thing at Lincoln Center. He had a reasonable explanation for

this, that it was overplayed and so forth, and once this gets into the press it's hard to live it down, and so on.

We decided that with their experience, we thought they were the most adaptable of the acoustical engineers, and we proposed that they be used. Belluschi agreed. We had Belford Brown with us on that trip, he flew up as well, and so he heard the whole discussion. He was quite satisfied and was able to do it. Then they had a couple of their men come out here--this model being the result of that--and, of course, they stayed on.

Riess: The model that you just showed me looks remarkably like Davies Symphony Hall, except in some aspects of the balconies.

DeMars: Yes. Well, this is because if you do what the acoustical engineers say has to be done, and put it into the formula, it comes out sort of that shape. I'm told that Chuck Bassett was trying, and some of his boys, to do something different, and I don't blame them in one way.

Putting Together the Architects: SOM Chosen

Riess: When did you lose this project, and why?

DeMars: Well, we went through a number of quite detailed things, and finally it came down that they really needed to decide. They were deeply into fundraising, and they--let me think of what happened first. I think it did happen that Belluschi had been introduced to Mrs. Davies. He has a very nice Italian accent, still, and he's a very charming guy, terribly knowledgeable, of course, and he won her over rather completely. I remember I picked him up at the airport either on that trip or another one, and he had just heard that she had made this major gift.

The next thing was to formalize the actual choosing of the architects. Belluschi, I must admit, was very careful here. We felt that there were so many unforeseen things in escalation and so forth that to be able to guarantee a figure was virtually impossible, even if they had to make major changes, which they might have to do, to scale down the actual project, which is often what you do when you find out what it's going to cost. They were already screaming about the overrun in escalation. Belluschi was proposing a formula where we would be paid costs plus, one of these formulas where your expenses are kept in monthly billings rather than saying a percentage. They wanted us to guarantee an actual price figure, you see, from the estimated parts.

We also felt that they might feel that we were not geared up to handle the thing. In fact, our office had shrunk over this period of time, because several years had gone by and we really were getting to the point where we had very little other work. We could have hired back a number of our major people in the firm that had worked on this kind of thing before, but instead we proposed associating with Gerald McCue in San Francisco. We had the option. We probably could have talked Skidmore into it. That was a consideration.

Riess: Yes, that's right, because that was already the old association in some way.

DeMars: But actually, Belluschi--I think if he had been strongly in favor of us joining up with Skidmore, he would have said so. He liked the idea of working with Jerry McCue's office. They've done a lot of big work, you see. Jerry had not yet left for Harvard, as the dean. Then, as far as capability, they were not quite as international.

Riess: Is it that they needed some prestigious name here?

DeMars: Well, the question of whether they had any questions about our technical capabilities of carrying out this big a job.

Riess: Were you hearing this from them directly, or was this what you were beginning to kind of get indirectly?

DeMars: Indirectly, yes. Then also we were almost making the point that we were in no position financially to go bankrupt. We couldn't guarantee that we could do it for this amount if escalation went on on the cost of it. They needed a firm--they almost said as much--where the firm for its prestige would take it on. In fact, I talked to John Merrill about this. He said, "What we need like a hole in the head is something to lose money on." I just said that this is one of the things they were sort of talking about--a firm that was capable of carrying that.

Riess: Did you find yourself in the position of having to say, "No, we can't take this on," or did they say that to you?

DeMars: I think it just came down that they chose Skidmore. They did ask McCue to make a financial analysis--in other words, an analysis of what their costs would be, what it would cost to do it, escalated to the time it would be done.

Riess: You mean if he had come associated with you?

DeMars: No, the architectural combine--what it would cost. They must have talked Skidmore into doing it cheaper from that end. They had never done a large hall, anyplace, and so they figured that their Chicago office--I mean, this I'm sort of putting together--they have offices in New York and Chicago, and so if one office got into trouble on this thing, they could be carried. They saw that neither Belluschi nor we either wanted to or were capable of carrying it if it got into that kind of trouble. That just sort of turned the faucet off.

At some point you asked about drumming up jobs to keep the staff going. All of our work had come to us through one thing or another--competitions and mostly invited. Any office that's making a living these days has somebody hired full-time either beating the bushes, or sending in the proper information, and reading the Daily Pacific Builder and all the magazines for new things coming up and so forth, and then you make presentations. It costs a fortune to do that, too.

Hearing from Kurt Herbert Adler

Riess: Can you remember when you met Adler?

DeMars: Yes, it was early on and it had to do with a new--they sometimes call it a bustle--extension of the opera house itself to provide more storage for sets and so forth on the stage floor, and above that picking up all the different other levels, new extended offices, ballet practice rooms, rehearsal rooms for the opera singers, and a number of other facilities of this sort that just weren't provided for in the building.

Riess: Was this a separate undertaking, or was this part of the whole Performing Arts Center complex?

DeMars: It was understood that along with the new symphony hall this thing would be done. In our other schemes, some of those facilities were in the plans.

Riess: You had been told that you shouldn't actually meet with Adler to talk to him about it?

DeMars: Yes.

Riess: Why was that?

DeMars: I forget how it was said. Well, "Not on our initiative." In other words, we couldn't go and have some philosophical discussions with him or even ask him what he wanted or whatever.

Riess: Is it that he was such a powerful guy and pretty soon he would get you all working for him?

DeMars: I think that might have been their worry, something like that. So he called up--this is on a Saturday or a Sunday--and said he wanted to know about such-and-such. I can't remember exactly what it was he was talking about. My answer was something like, "Mr. Adler, you know we were instructed that we're not to discuss some of these things with you directly, not knowing what limitations we could agree to or whatever."

And he said, "Who's telling you that? If I want to talk to the architects of this thing, I'm going to do it! They're not going to tell me I can't talk to the architects. Don't you think that's right?"

I said, "Well, I do, actually, but--" [laughs]

"Well, so, what's such-and-such and such-and-such?" [laughs]

I was rather delighted.

John Wells's Role in the DeMars Firm

Riess: At that time your firm was DeMars & Wells?

DeMars: Yes. In fact, Don didn't have too much to do with Zellerbach Hall. He was, sort of there at the beginning, but then he--

Riess: Well, after all, it was his adage that, "If you're in at the beginning, you won't be in at the end!"

DeMars: Yes, it came true, didn't it?

Riess: When did your association with John Wells start, and why?

DeMars: Oh, he had been, actually, an associate of the firm from--I forget exactly the date. It was evident that neither Don nor I are the world's greatest businessmen, among other things. John showed his genius along this line at an early stage. He ran the drafting room--we were allowed to speak to the draftsmen--[laughs] and did it very well. We very soon made him an associate, and we had a

retirement plan and so forth. We all had hourly wages we paid ourselves, and these varied. In other words, my seniority, I got a buck more or so. Maybe Don Reay--I don't know. Maybe we got the same hourly wage. Looking back on it now, I can't remember.

Riess: But did John Wells get you more organized in your thinking about all of this?

DeMars: Oh, yes. The production of design to an extent goes on, but it shouldn't, because it's very costly to modify things in the working drawing stage.

One of the first things you do--you've been working with the engineers consultants--you try to freeze the scheme with the outlines of the building, and the rooms, and all this sort of thing. You try to see if you can't get all of that settled, how it works with the client and so on. Then, in a case like ours, you blow it up from the smaller scale you've been working at to the final scale of sets of the drawings that are going to be the working drawings. We call that the design development stage.

The "contract documents" is really the proper thing to call these, because now the engineers are doing sort of hard-line drawings on this. It's still on the same outline drawing of all the rooms, but the electrical engineers do a completely separate thing for all the general lighting, motors, etc. You have another engineer for the plumbing. Then stage lighting in a theater is a total other discipline. They do some working together; there has to be some coordination.

All of this that I'm describing is something that someone has to be coordinating at the architects' end. John Wells is excellent at that. He's also an excellent estimator and usually was very conservative. That's why our estimate came within the budget, but the winning contractor came four hundred thousand dollars under the budget. [chuckles]

Have I missed any of them? The structural, of course, is one of the prime ones and is involved from the beginning because it completely influences the design, and hence the plans the other consultants work from. Heating and ventilating gets quite elaborate. The duct work is incredible on a building like the theater, because it isn't working out one floor, and then the floors repeat or something. It's different all over the place. You try to have an office which decides at a certain point: no new ideas now--no improvement of this, no second thoughts.

Riess: In the office, were you the wild guy who zoomed in on Monday morning to change everything?

DeMars: Oh, no, hardly ever. I think I was pretty aware of everything going on in the projects I was working on. Don Reay was in charge of some, and John Wells of others. Before that, I did my own working drawings and so forth. In other words, I had done things in which I had worked it out to the last, not without a lighting guy, but I laid out where I wanted everything.

Riess: So you were relatively disciplined, but John Wells was even more.

DeMars: Well, he was more, since he was dealing with mostly the nitty-gritty of the thing.

He was really quite a competent designer, although he lacked confidence in himself. We would almost joke about it a bit, because when he finally did his own house, he would sneak around and ask Ralph Panecaldo: "What do you think? Do you think I ought to do this?" And Ralph would say, "For God's sakes! If you want to do it, do it!"

"Well," he said, "how do you think this would look?"

"I think it would look perfectly all right, John!"

Then he would go and talk to Tom Aidala. It ended up that he had tried out his plans on almost everybody in the office, and it's a lovely house.

Riess: Did you have that feeling when you were designing something? Did you need to have it validated in that same way?

DeMars: No, not everything I did. I mean, I'm quite confident about some sort of decisions. But others, I really felt I wanted to know, too. We all do this. It goes on. And in an office, unless you're a terrible prima donna or something, when you have certain ideas you try them out in the roughest kind of a way. "Do you see any reason why you shouldn't be doing this?"

Eero Saarinen would ask everyone coming through the office--and this included the janitor!--his or her reactions to a design that was developing.

XX MORE BIG NAMES, AND THE ARCHITECT'S PERSONA

[Interview 15: June 1, 1989]##

Philip Johnson, and Le Corbusier

Riess: I have here a list of big names in architecture, not in any particular order. I'm hoping you'll have some stories associated with these people. Philip Johnson is the first one I wrote down. You said something to me once about staying in his guest house. That's in New Canaan, Connecticut?

DeMars: Yes.

Riess: Why were you there?

DeMars: I had gone back to seek his advice on a consultant for Zellerbach Hall, which of course wasn't called Zellerbach Hall yet--a theater consultant. I wanted to meet [Jo] Mielziner, who was a famous theatrical designer. I did have an appointment with him and saw him. He was very cordial, he didn't rush me or anything, but he was totally booked up for consulting work and just didn't feel that he could do it. But he made some suggestions.

I had known Philip from the days when I was first back east in Washington because of his connection with the Museum of Modern Art, and Betty Mock being curator and head of the architectural department there--this is Catherine Bauer's sister.

Riess: Did you talk architecture with him?

DeMars: You know, a lot of times, almost the same way as--I never talked architecture with Gropius or Breuer. It was assumed that we each knew what the other one did, sort of. I don't know. You don't go like a student, with hat in hand, and say, "What do you think about the such-and-such?" Again, I didn't have that much contact with some of them.

Riess: I understand what you're saying. It's disappointing, though, in some way, isn't it?

DeMars: Yes, yes. You would think that there would be times when--. It might happen that there is, say, a new building you can pan or something like this.

Riess: If you can find a common third thing to focus on.

DeMars: Yes, yes. That's really the thing. I hadn't thought of this before just as such.

I met him on and off, and so on, and then--stop me if I've told you about the time I met him with Corbusier.

Riess: I don't think so, no.

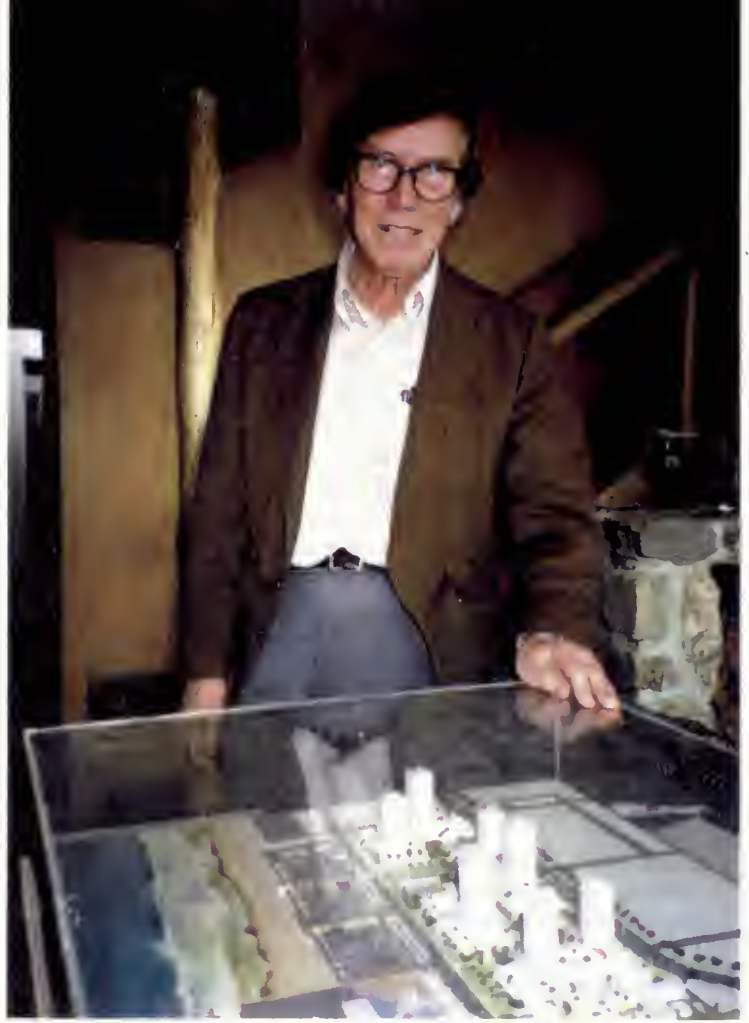
DeMars: Oh, all right, we'll throw this one in. Let's see. I remember when Wurster and Catherine were living in Cambridge already, in 1943, I'd say. Betty and I went up to visit them--I guess on our first trip. Philip had his first house, the one with the high fence. Do you know about this one? It's sort of the prototype of one of his house types. In fact, it's the one that was included in Ladies' Home Journal as a model.

Riess: Where is it?

DeMars: It's in Cambridge, not more than a block or so from where Wurster was living, off Brattle Street. It consisted of a corner lot--. Think of the house as being, say, twelve feet high, just on a flat slab. Then one wall of the house simply extends out to the corner and turns the corner completely, so here's a fence twelve feet high. In the middle of that was a door which had to be up about three inches, in order to clear the grass or whatever.

When we went by, since we couldn't see through the fence, we all took turns getting down on our knees looking through under the door to see the inside. You see, the entire wall of the house, fence to fence across the entry lawn was glass. I have this picture someplace of Bill and Catherine both down on their knees, with their behinds up in the air, looking under the crack of Philip Johnson's glass house! [chuckles] Catherine had, really, quite a fine sense of humor about a number of things, and she laughed about that one.

Riess: First Philip Johnson was at the Museum of Modern Art [1930-1936], and then he went to Harvard to study with Gropius. Maybe that house was designed in school. He received his architecture degree in 1943.



Vernon DeMars, at home being interviewed, 1991.

DeMars: Could be.

Also, if you remember, that's when the Ladies' Home Journal did that series of houses, and the one in the model there is almost identically the model of the house which had been built first. It was completed, and it was published. It consists of a kind of a chicken shed facing south, with complete glass on the side facing south, and maybe some little windows on the north side in a very logical way. Plato, I think, wrote a piece on how to design a house and described exactly that--a wide roof overhang on the south.

Riess: You don't sound like you're much admiring of it.

DeMars: Oh, yes, yes! I am, but I'm sort of joking about it.

Riess: Well then, if it's all so logical, why doesn't everyone always do that?

DeMars: Well, for a while, sort of, some of us did. [chuckles] John Funk did practically that same thing, but total floor-to-ceiling glass only has certain places where it's applicable. It's a place where you have other kinds of privacy, like a twelve-foot fence completely around your property and joining up with the house.

Just one other Philip Johnson thing. When the war came along he was drafted. He had some very menial jobs because he was suspected of having a Nazi sympathy or something once. I don't think that was it--or was it? Whatever it was, he had really a nasty job in the army. I was in Puerto Rico. My wife Betty was with me. When we were leaving, we went by ship to Bermuda and the Bahamas, and landed in New York on our way home, you see. I was mustered out.

I called up Betty Mock at the museum, where she still was, and she was delighted to hear from me. "What a coincidence!" she said, "Philip Johnson has asked me to come over after dinner to meet Le Corbusier. Just his sister is going to be there, and I'm sure he would be happy to have you join us. I'll check."

She did, and so that's the way I met Le Corbusier. It was very nice. I was in full uniform still, and I still had my undress ropes which showed I was the governor's naval aide. Corbusier only spoke in French. I think it was evident that he could understand English reasonably well, but he proceeded to tell us, at one point, how he had had his throat cut in the Casbah. He showed us the scar, and I didn't know, at first, whether he was

pulling our leg or whatever. I don't know whether I've heard anyone else confirm this.

Riess: Is this another evening where three architects didn't talk about architecture?

DeMars: We must have been talking about Algeria and so forth. I don't know.

Riess: You had the Telesis experience behind you. Maybe you had an opportunity to tell him how influential his program for that exhibit had been, "Des canons, des Munitions," etc. You know what I am talking about?

DeMars: Oh, the exhibit for the fair.

Riess: Yes, and you said that was influential in your Telesis exhibit. So, did you talk to him about that?

DeMars: I don't think so. Isn't that strange? I suppose, in a way, we didn't talk about me very much at that occasion. [laughter] What the hell would we have talked about?

Riess: Would you have mentioned Telesis?

DeMars: I don't think so. I would say it didn't seem as important then as it seems in retrospect now. In fact, I didn't know, at that time, of Telesis Two and Three, because they were going on at that time. I had left there very shortly after the first one.

Riess: So you can't remember anything, particularly, of that evening.

DeMars: No.

Riess: Now, let's get on. I'm being terrible! I sound just like a prosecutor: "We will now move on to New Canaan." [laughs]

DeMars: So that was that evening. Then years go by, and in about 1962 I went back to New York to see what we could get. I had planned to see Philip. I don't think Lincoln Center had been done yet. He was in the midst of it. He introduced me to Lincoln Kirstein, a very important mover in theater and ballet and all this kind of thing, who gave me some fatherly advice. I guess we visited him afterwards--Philip suggested it. That is also when he introduced me to Ben Schlanger.

Riess: Was that when you slept in the guest house?

DeMars: I guess it was on that occasion. Philip had to be off to do something in the morning, and I think on the way back to New York is when I stopped at Yale to meet [Paul] Rudolph and visit the architecture school there.

We went up, and I think maybe--we couldn't have had dinner in his house. But the kitchen is right in the living room, a great, beautiful buffet, and then the Nadelman sculpture--papier mâché, it seemed to me it was--which he finally had done in travertine, about twenty feet high, in his theater in Lincoln Center. The originals--my recollection is that they were about five feet high in papier mâché, these two women figures. I always liked them. That was the one main thing in this room.

This is a house completely glazed in. And instead of curtains that fold up, there are things a little bit more like shojis that hang on the inside. But they are of curtain material and they slide out of the way. I guess you could close it off, but it's at least a half a mile in, I think, from any neighbor. I don't think there's anyone close enough to bother. In other words, he has the screening of the landscape.

The other thing in the house, besides a furniture group, the other work of art is a genuine eighteenth-century landscape painting. (You would recognize the name if I could remember it.) This sets on a couple of stands right by the Mies van der Rohe chair. You can see he doesn't feel compelled to have modern art. His house is the art. Later on, he built a museum out there to hold certain things.

I don't know. What the hell did we talk about?

Riess: Was he fun, or pompous?

DeMars: He was fun and often almost self-deprecating in the things he would talk about, when they involved him. He didn't need any apology.

Riess: Was he interested in the academic-ness of you?

DeMars: Only semi. [laughs] Yes.

The guest house was completely brick with little arches inside, a slightly more Turkish-looking situation. It was about, oh, fifty feet from the other house. I went away a virgin-- [laughs]--not the way I went in. I don't know whether that got into the picture of what he had to do when he was in the army, I think it may have, but they had him cleaning latrines and things. I don't know that he had any alternative but to take it--. He

would talk about it, not with major indignation, he sort of just let it drop. You could work it out from there. But that's about all of that little story.

Norman Fletcher. and Walter Gropius

Riess: Okay. Moving right down, we have Gropius. You had a connection with Gropius or with a student of Gropius's?

DeMars: Oh, yes, this was Norman Fletcher. We were at the stage in Farm Security where all of the farm projects had been done and we were now involved in the war housing. We were doing some of the dormitories for single men. This was working out very well. These were in Vallejo.

Wurster was doing this single-family housing on the other side of the main highway, just beyond the bridge as you drive into Vallejo. Ours was on the right-hand side with the freeway going between. I think we had an order for some more dormitories that were repeating the same ones we had done. These were two-story buildings. I forget how many they held. But our whole group of buildings housed three thousand men.

Then it was quite evident that these guys--they were working in the shipyard, you see--were quite a long way from anyplace to eat. So they decided there should be a cafeteria. There really wasn't an office at first. They didn't have one. The infrastructure didn't seem to be-- Well, we weren't, in this case, involved in that. Our role was simply to design these dormitories. Apparently they thought, well, it was about time to do the rest of the things that were needed.

So, arriving one day at our office in San Francisco was a young man, Norman Fletcher, with a friend. They had done their postgraduate student tour across the country, looking at architecture and things. Apparently it had already been on Fletcher's mind to come and announce that he was available to work for us.

Riess: He was a student of Gropius's.

DeMars: He was a student of Walter Gropius. He didn't announce it right at the beginning, but he showed that he was a bit knowledgeable. He had seen the publications, and we talked about these things. Then he said that he would like to work for us, and I thought, "Well, he certainly is bright, and hearing about his background,

working with Gropius and Breuer and so forth, it might be a pretty good idea."

Then, he said right afterwards, "Of course, I wouldn't expect to be paid, because I'm just graduating, and I might not be worth all that much."

I went and talked to my immediate boss, Herb Halsteen, the district engineer, about taking this young graduate on. His first reaction was, "We can't take anybody else on. We're going to have to make do." It occurred to me that he was just thinking of the budget, and I told Herb he looks rather capable, and I think there are some things he could work on, and he doesn't want to get paid.

Halsteen's reply was, "Well, you can't have a guy working here and not getting paid something." That, I assumed, meant, "Okay, hire him." So we got him to design the new cafeteria building, using all of the elements of the prefabricated building system that we were using on these other buildings. It would join an office annex also to be designed. His ideas seemed quite good. All the detailing was the same as they were using in these other buildings, and it made quite a decent-looking building--all very spartan, in a way.

It wasn't quite finished, the work he had to do on it, when he decided it was time for him to move on to Mexico, which they were going to do next. And I said, "Oh, no, you don't! You're going to stay and finish this." [laughs] He sort of gulped. I think it was a matter of staying two or three weeks more, which he did. Maybe it was a month--I don't know. He was a little taken aback at first, that he couldn't just go on.

We got to be quite good friends, and we corresponded, and then when I went east after the Farm Security folded up I guess I visited him. By that time, he was working for Gropius. The Architect's Collaborative--TAC--was already started. I visited Carl Koch there, because he was in our office in Washington. I met all this particular group. They were all about that same age. I was their senior by quite a little bit.

We were talking about the war and who was getting drafted next, and so forth, and then, a little bit later, I heard that he had been drafted and declared himself a conscientious objector. "What was his church?" Well, he didn't belong to a church. He was just conscientiously objecting to shooting people. He wasn't against putting his time in and trying to do his duty for the country. There was a hearing of some sort about it. Whether it was a civilian judge--it would have been a civilian, I think, for

conscientious objectors--and he said he would put in his time. The judge said, "What would you want to do?"

"Well," he said, "I've been trained as an architect. I think one of the things the country needs is housing. I wouldn't mind even war housing. People have to live in these things and my talents could be used there. I wouldn't expect to be paid any different than the others are."

The judge thought that was very generous of him, and he decided they would do that. He [Fletcher] would have to submit the office he was working for and the project to show that it was legitimate. And his salary would be quite a bit higher working in the office than as a GI. That would leave something over, and he was to send that back.

"Your Honor," he said, "I have one more request. I would like to have the excess after my army pay sent to Gandhi in India." The judge came down hard with the gavel and said, "Young man, you had your day in court. Don't push me any farther." [laughter]

A Lesson in Presentation

DeMars: It was with a sincere innocence that he would propose this, as if any rational person could see the logic of what he was saying, and so on.

Riess: New subject. I've heard the story of how Bob Anshen came to design the Ralph Davies's house in Woodside. I heard it from Louise Davies, but I wondered what the gossip is.

DeMars: The way I heard it, and I don't think I heard it from Bob Anshen himself, it wouldn't have been the kind of thing, unless jokingly, sometime, he would have told. (We would go to the Purple Onion and have drinks together and so on. I guess we talked about architecture a bit. Sort of, "Where's it going?" You could do that sort of thing, a bit. He was Frank Lloyd Wright-leaning, and not just the international school.)

The story was that he wrote to the president of Standard Oil [Ralph Davies] and asked for a half-hour of his time, and sent a check for \$100 in the letter. That surprised them enough that they brought him in. He proposed to them that they ought to have a complete redesign of their Standard stations, a design which really expressed the contemporary status of a gas station. In

other words, it shouldn't be an imitation mission, or whatever, selling gasoline.

His first design of the Standard station became the standard design for that. I think he did a lot of other work for them as well. That got the firm really launched, I think.

Riess: There must be a certain amount of wining and dining of people to get their business.

DeMars: Yes, this is just another way.

Riess: How else do you get yourself known out there?

DeMars: Now you have people in your firm out beating the bushes and getting you in the magazines, and reading the Daily Pacific Builder to see every invitation for submissions of credentials. Someone's going to build a new building, and they announce it, and you then submit your--

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Riess: It seems to me that this need to make yourself known would encourage the development of some of these qualities of personality that we've been talking about, the more flamboyant and dramatic.

DeMars: Yes, if you hide your light under a bushel, or are a shrinking violet, even to get a very good job as a draftsman--unless you were so damn good, you see, with some skill that would be immediately recognized, that allows you to be very modest and retiring.

Riess: I wonder at what point in architectural school people begin to figure that out and start creating that persona, and how architecture schools help or hinder that?

DeMars: I think it must be a personality trait that they would have under any circumstances.

Riess: I was thinking that there are ways that they could best present their designs that would guarantee attention.

DeMars: Well, most of the professors will not make a point of this during a presentation.

Typically the student presents his work at the end of a semester. They're called "juries," or a "review." I've been on a couple just these last few weeks. They are trying to get rid of

the word "jury." You're not being judged, you see, it's a review of your work. You will be judged at some time, and there's a little bit of it going on there, but I think it's right to call it a review and take some of the pressure off.

Twice this last time, for two groups, I've said, "Here is one of your opportunities. You're before a city council or the board of directors, or it's a school board, or it's something else, and you're going to present this project to them. Now, here's the time to speak so the ones in the back can hear. Don't stand in front of it. Use a pointer. Speak loud enough so we can hear it."

I didn't go through all this at once, because it came up after. A couple of students were standing there and describing their project, covering it up, and talking to the wall, and mumbling, and all of this. Then there were students in the back of the room talking, because they couldn't hear anyway, you see.

At one point, I stopped the proceedings and gave my little lecture. First I asked, "Can you hear back there?" and a couple of them said, "Yes," but I knew they couldn't. Others said, "No." I said, "Well, why don't you come closer, because this is a kind of thing that we have to do as architects, and you won't be given many chances when you get into an office, because the boss is going to be doing that, or someone else. So here's the time to practice, and for someone to tell you, honestly, how you did."

They really should take courses in public speaking, where someone could be very hypercritical. Because when students are too shy, and you've got some foreign students, and so forth, you sort of hesitate to drill them on that kind of thing.

Louis Kahn

Riess: Louis Kahn is on our list, and you said that there was a story.

DeMars: Well, it was about the war housing. I guess I first met him when I was with the National Housing Agency. When I first got back to Washington, I went out with a group that were to pass final inspection on one of the war housing developments. At this stage, or rather earlier on, they used the war housing program as a chance to do some experimental things. Here was housing that didn't have to be sold. You just had to house people.

The AIA and some architects of stature said, "If the standard housing that we're supposed to be grinding out, if we find faults in it, give us a little corner to design and let us use that same amount of money to do something different." Do you recall me showing you in that magazine, Arts and Architecture, how at Vallejo, they let Wurster do his thing?

Riess: Oh, yes, I know what you're talking about.

DeMars: I guess this must have been the case with Kahn, where they let him do a half a dozen houses which, as far as I know, were what Frank Lloyd Wright had proposed. Instead of a row house, you would call it a cluster house, and instead of parallel walls open on the two sides, think of, like in an egg crate, if you make a gigantic three-dimensional "X," so that it has four party walls. Anyway, it was a chance to build it.

Riess: Did it work?

DeMars: Well, yes, in a sense. Kitchens are all grouped in the middle. That was the argument here. All the plumbing and things were back in the center. It would have a skylight over that and ventilation. Of course, that meant the houses faced in four directions--I mean, this ninety-degree angle house built into that corner. It has certain limitations. Anyway, it was interesting to see it done.

I met Lou Kahn on a few occasions after that. Of course, he was one of the jurors on the Golden Gateway. We would meet on various kinds of things, always friendly. Again, we didn't have a chance to talk architecture. [laughs]

Riess: Well, you're having your chance with me.

Charles Warren Callister, and Jack Hillmer

Riess: [Charles Warren] Callister--he came in 1946 from Texas.

DeMars: Yes. When Telesis One got published--these things were in the magazines and so forth, and it was all over the country. When other people found that they agreed with "progress intelligently planned and directed," they said, "That's for us."

As I understand it, they had an office in Texas. I don't know whether they had just graduated or what it was, but they decided they would come to California.

Riess: He and Jack Hillmer.

DeMars: Yes. They came through Los Angeles anyway. We'll have to straighten this out with Gerrie [Geraldine Knight] Scott as to whether they came and joined their outfit there [Southern California Telesis] or were partially responsible for getting it going. I think they found that it wasn't in Los Angeles, and so, "Well, let's start one." That's the way I had heard the story. They must have gotten together there.

Riess: And then they came up here pretty immediately?

DeMars: Well, no, I think they must have been there for a while and participated in that one. Besides, Jack, maybe both of them, had come to work as draftsmen in the wartime airplane industry--or maybe Warren had an architectural commission or two.

Riess: Callister's firm has done a few new town projects.

DeMars: Yes, and rather large. He was the first architect, I think, for Rossmoor out here, for the first buildings and so forth, and may have had something to do with the general layout. He's been quite successful.

Jack is such a perfectionist--Jack Hillmer. They did a house together in Sausalito, I think, and I don't know when they parted company the first time, because they're back together again, years later. Somehow or other, Jack got this commission for, I think it's the Ludekens house on Belvedere, an extremely expensive house.

Riess: Is that the one with the stone wall inside?

DeMars: Yes. He went up to the Sierra and picked out the mountain, and he picked out the piece of slab that they drilled it off of, and the flatbed truck that brought it down, and arranged for hiring the barge that brought it in. You know, I mean, this sounds like Christo.

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Although Jack doesn't throw himself around in that way. He just wants the job well done with the right things. It was highly published. During this period, he had a friend that was a photographer, Roy Flamm, and they did this beautiful set of photographs of the thing.

Riess: That would help, wouldn't it?

DeMars: Yes. Oh, it did. The basins in the bathroom were *lignum vitae*.

Riess: That's right. I've been to that house. I took an Extension class from him about twenty years ago, on Bay Area architecture.

DeMars: Well, it's interesting now, and you can edit this or not, but I think that Callister, who's married and has two children--I think they're grown now, and so forth--he and Jack were "good friends," shall we say? Now they're sort of back together again, and they live in Tiburon.

Riess: Callister's office is in Tiburon.

DeMars: Yes, and he lives within about three blocks--the house up on the hill there.

Now Jack has been remodeling a house in San Francisco--one of Wurster's early houses. I don't know whether he works with Callister at all or not. I guess Callister knows what he can do and so maybe he does occasionally--I haven't pursued this with him, particularly, to find out. But he was very interested in one of Wurster's townhouses in San Francisco that needed extensive remodeling to make it adaptable to another use. I don't remember quite what it is, but he had *carte blanche*, which is what he likes and what he needs--new skylights and moving partitions, and it doesn't matter what it costs. That's the way the client was.

Thomas Church, Bill Wurster, and Barrows Hall

Riess: You said something earlier about Thomas Church's attempt to convince Bill Wurster that putting Barrows Hall where it is was a mistake. But Wurster was determined.

DeMars: In Thomas Church's oral history--he was already passed on when this was all done?

Riess: He hadn't passed on, but he was unable to be interviewed because of his illness.

DeMars: Oh, yes. So someone else filled in the period of how he was working for the University as a consulting architect?

Riess: Oh, yes. He was in on the master planning in the sixties. And I believe you said he did some wonderful work as the campus landscape architect.

DeMars: Yes. A lot of them were little details, but one major thing was rescuing Strawberry Creek from being just a drain under all those bushes. He proposed clearing the undergrowth, so that you could see the creek now and then, and bringing it as a visual thing. There are various places where you could still see it, but there didn't seem to be much consciousness or appreciation of it on the campus. There were lots of places where it just disappeared into trees, and at one point between the dining commons--no, a little further down, where that little bridge on the west side of the dining commons crosses the creek--below there, there were a group of handball courts that actually bridged the creek.

The typical philosophy was thinking of creeks as something to put in a drain. (There's a whole group in Berkeley now that want to rescue the creek where it goes through town.) Anyway, we got rid of the handball courts there, and now you can see the creek. I think the crossings, the bridges and so forth that he did, are all very sensitive landscaping.

I can't quite remember what period this came about, but I know that Wurster's thesis about further development on campus was that some buildings ought to go up higher than the typical four stories in order to rescue open space. This was the theory of Gropius about high-rise apartments, that you needed open breathing space, and so you would have high-rise buildings spaced apart, and you would have playfields below. This theory still is somewhat applicable, because everyone enjoys the park-like atmosphere of the Berkeley campus, and you really shouldn't spread out with low-rise buildings.

Bill thought that certain spots, where they were appropriate and where it was appropriate to the actual program, you could actually do a high-rise elevator building. One of the spots that he felt was logical, and this is before Barrows Hall, was Wurster Hall, where the rooms, the studios, were occupied for a long part of the day. That was done and in place. The spot where I don't think there was the same logic for it, was Barrows Hall, the School of Business Administration. There are classes coming and going, and I doubt they spend a long time in the rooms.

And elevators are really kind of a pain for handling great crowds. I don't know how well that works, from that point of view. I don't think the building works badly, from times that I've been in it, but many of us felt its location was unfortunate, simply because that was one location that didn't have any high-rise buildings in it yet. As a matter of fact, I don't know whether we had Eshleman Hall, which is in the student center, but

that doesn't bother anybody, really, except casting a shadow on the student center itself.

Riess: Church actually tried to influence his friend Bill.

DeMars: Yes. He made a visual presentation. He had photographs taken from Wurster Hall, which looks towards the bay, to show how this great thing coming up blocks off the Golden Gate, and so forth, and how when you look up Telegraph Avenue, and you used to see the Campanile, he foresaw that this was going to cut it off halfway, which it does. Also, I had objected because of the view from the terrace of the student center.

This was all shown to Bill, and it seemed to have cut no ice at all, because the principle was that in that area there ought to be a high-rise building. Then some others tried to push it to the south end of the field--there's a large playfield there. That, in a way, would have been unfortunate, because that would cast a great big shadow on the playfield, and for field games you want it sunny.

I wasn't in on all of the arguments, except knowing that Tommy Church had gone to this effort and apparently it did not sway Wurster to modify it, or to move it, or to do anything else. The faculty of the College of Environmental Design, I think, pleaded the point. I don't think it pleaded it quite like a student sit-in or like a real organized movement.

Riess: But it was perfectly clear that they were against it.

DeMars: Yes, I think so.

Riess: And what about [Don] McLaughlin on that one?

DeMars: Well, I guess that since it was done, and I didn't know McLaughlin that well, it was already too late. So it wasn't quite a thing to bring up.

Riess: How is it that now, in the last ten years, they have decided to go underground on some of these buildings? What makes that possible now, and why didn't anyone ever think of that then?

DeMars: Well, in the first place it's more expensive, in general, and I don't know the rationale for doing it now, since I haven't been in on it or consulted on it. I don't know what my opinion would be. Unless there's something very special about the new animal facility--is that what you're thinking of?

Riess: I'm thinking of the Bechtel Engineering Center, which is a wonderful underground solution.

DeMars: Yes. It's only partially underground. In that particular case, this was an open space surrounded by rather high buildings on all sides, and so the thought of losing one of the open spaces on the campus--. George Matsumoto came in with a thing which wouldn't stick up that high above the surroundings, and the roof garden would be pleasant to see from the other buildings. It wouldn't be the site for a three- or even a four-story building.

Ralph Rapson

Riess: Let's go to Ralph Rapson.

DeMars: Rapson was and is a guy with a kind of a good sense of humor, a rather raffish fellow in a way, serious about his art, but not deadly serious. I don't think he did the kind of things that some do that only an "in" group would understand. I think he did the embassy in Bonn. He's done some important buildings for the State Department and so on. And then he went from MIT to become the dean in Minnesota.

I knew Ralph Rapson when I was teaching at MIT, and he was teaching there. I remember every issue of Pencil Points--later on Progressive Architecture--they would have a two-bedroom house or some house competition, and he was winning them all. Everyone knew the Rapson plans and designs. They had a lot of influence, because he was winning all of these competitions. He was very interesting to have for a friend.

Riess: Did you talk architecture? [laughs]

DeMars: Well, I guess we did, a bit. I remember we did when we were working on 100 Memorial Drive [Eastgate Apartments] together. There was a good deal of argument, and so forth.

Was he married? I'm trying to think. If he wasn't, he had a girlfriend or two. I think he wasn't married at that time, because he had a kind of a basement apartment right off Harvard Square on Brattle Street where it turns from the center of Harvard. There was a rather large living room, and the ceiling was somewhat low, maybe nine feet. My recollection is that the ceiling was black, and he did a bit of art work and things, and collected peculiar things.

I don't know whether it was the first time I noticed it, but I went there and drank with him one night, and I saw that all over the ceiling there were footprints, just as if someone had gotten up and walked on the ceiling. I guess I didn't even want to let him know that I was that curious about it, you see.

Then again I got invited down for a drink with some of the boys--I guess it was early in the evening or whatever, and some of the students from his class were there. The lights were turned low, and they brought out some paper, newspaper or something, and put it on the floor and had me take my shoes off. They spread paint on this, white paint. (Or maybe the faculty were red, and the students were white.) And I walked into that--got my feet on this thing--and two husky students turned me upside down and printed me up on the ceiling. [laughter]

So I learned--I guess it was water paint, because I was then carried into the bathroom, and I washed my feet off. But that would be a typical Rapson kind of thing. I get Christmas cards from him continuously.

Nat Owings, SOM, Alvar Aalto, and the Benedictines

Riess: Now, how about Nat Owings?

DeMars: Oh, the little story that just--I would meet Nat Owings on and off over the years.

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DeMars: I knew John Merrill [son of Merrill of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill] as a student. The school was small enough. I don't believe he was in my class, but I knew him well enough. We were friendly, and we would meet at things back there. It's always been friendly over the years.

I guess my first real contact with Nat Owings was during the Ferry Building park thing thirty years ago--longer than that now. There were a number of meetings in which he was there, and I remember hearings and so on. And then, on and off, our paths would cross, and in the Golden Gateway business they were involved in that. We had some dealings.

In fact, after the residential part had been built, Skidmore got the job of doing what is now the Alcoa Building. That particular block, that entire block, was supposed to have been

part of Wurster, DeMars & Reay's commission. I think that's the way it worked finally. The actual podium, the slab with the garage in it--I think the Wurster office pretty much handled that. We sort of semi-designed it up to that point, but I don't recall having too much to do with it or needing too much to do. We probably got a modest profit out of it, but that's all.

Then Perini had to get a client for the Alcoa Building. When they got Alcoa, Alcoa said, "We always have Skidmore do our buildings." So that's the way Skidmore did it. We were listed as associate architects or consulting architects, something like that, and were invited to several of the meetings to hear what they had decided, which we approved of, and so on.

[laughs] Then, of course, we were able to be included in a lawsuit. A lady had sprained her ankle while crossing the podium roof, the one that has the great dandelion fountain, you know, on the east side. If she hadn't been crossing it diagonally, she wouldn't have sprained her ankle, I guess, but she stepped off of the end of it. Everybody was sued for a million dollars each. Our attorney was able to show that our connection with the whole operation was so tenuous that we could not possibly have had any responsibility for the design of it. I think that even Skidmore got out of it. Do you sue people because they trip getting on the curb of the sidewalk? They're supposed to be looking where they're going, to some extent.

The next thing that I think is sort of interesting about Nat Owings--. Dick Peters's specialty has been in lighting, both artificial and regular lighting. He has consulted. He's been on a number of the projects which Charles Moore has done. I thought at one time he was part of the team. He's often part of the team as a consulting lighting engineer. He was listed as being responsible for the lighting of the New Orleans Fair, and so on. He's known.

One of his [Peters's] favorite subjects has been Alvar Aalto. On one of his sabbaticals he went to Finland. He went there in the summertime and visited all of Aalto's buildings, clear up to the Arctic Circle--in the middle of the summer when there's light all day long. He went back at midwinter and photographed the same buildings to show how they were lit. Then he wrote a piece about this in one of the architectural magazines.

Well, Nat Owings read this article. He had been planning a visit to Finland and wanted to meet the Aaltos. Of course Alvar Aalto had passed on when this happened. This may have been about ten years ago. Owings wrote to Dick Peters and told him he had read this article, and that it was the best thing he had read

about Finland, and Aalto's work, and so forth. He wondered, "Was Peters in a position to give him a letter of introduction to Mrs. Aalto?"

When Dick got the letter he phoned Mrs. Aalto, which is the way he likes to do things, and told her about the whole thing, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and so forth. "Would it be possible for Mr. Owings to visit?" With this much warning, the red carpet was the treatment he got. They took him around to all Aalto's things, no matter how many hundreds of miles away they were.

Riess: Who actually took him around? The Aalto firm?

DeMars: The Aalto firm and office. Now, whether it was there at the time that he brought this up, I don't know. But what happened was that on the tenth anniversary of Mount Angel Abbey Library the monks wanted to have a celebration, because it also coincided with the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Benedictine order.¹ These two together were the subject of a celebration. (I didn't learn this until I went to the event.) We were put up in the retreat house, all the visitors. Nat Owings and his wife were invited, and it turned out that he was a major sponsor of the celebration.

When I got there, I discovered that it's on the top of a kind of an acropolis, which you can't see. It's about the size of the Acropolis in Athens--flat top and then the sides dropping off. Aalto's library drops off on one side, and there's this great green meadow in the middle. Nat Owings had seen--maybe it was in New York--an exhibition of Aalto's work. This was in 1980--this event.

Riess: After he had been to Finland he saw the exhibition in New York?

DeMars: Either when he was there, or later, he talked to Mrs. Aalto about having the exhibition brought to Mount Angel, which would be appropriate. It had furniture, it had photos, and it was very nicely designed, as only the Finns can do. It really covered Aalto's work in the whole thing.

"Well, where would they put it?" There was really no place. There was a gymnasium. That wouldn't look very good. In the library, there was a little exhibit space but not much. Owings said, "We'll have it on the meadow, and we'll have it in a tent, a

¹ See "Aalto's Second American Building: An Abbey Library for a Hillside in Oregon," Architectural Record, May 1971.

circus tent. We'll have a tent for it." They said they couldn't afford this. "I'll pay for it."

So he [Nat Owings] designed the tent, and apparently when he went up there he didn't like the colors they used in the first tent. They changed it. There were pennants on the top and so forth, little things with the "10th Anniversary of Mount Angel," and so forth. On the other side, it had "1500th Anniversary of the Benedictines." On the opening occasion they had a great banquet. The Benedictines love to throw a party. Gosh, there was a buffet with prawns and lobster and all that you wanted to drink.

Another thing. Apparently, in discussing it with Mrs. Aalto, he said, "I'll design the tent." But besides that, the exhibit had been in France, it had been in England, it had gone through the U.S. It was beginning to look a little shopworn. He said, "I'll pay, if we need new photographs, to put it together so it looks first-rate." He picked up the tab on the whole thing.

Mrs. Owings [Margaret Wentworth Owings] was there as well. They had events during the day, as you can tell by the little book you saw of the original thing. Dick Peters was up there, and Eric Vartiainen came in. Also, there was Mrs. Aalto. The head of the furniture firm and the head draftsman of the office in Finland came.

Riess: This is Artek?

DeMars: Artek Pasco, yes. I think there were about four of them from Finland that came to the event.

There was a time for speeches and thank-yous and this kind of thing. Nat Owings was the master of ceremonies at the affair, too. This was held right in front of the church and looked out toward the tent occupying the space in here. When he looked out and saw the banners here, he said he could understand a tenth anniversary such as this. And he said, "Not a few years back, we even had a 200th anniversary of the United States. I can understand that. But the 1500th anniversary of the founding of an order, that you know the date and so forth. This I have difficulty with." [laughs] I forget how he put it. He was just sort of bowled over by this event.

What we learned, as I understand it, is that the Benedictines don't necessarily recognize the Pope. They sort of preceded, they feel. They were an independent group. They were Catholics, but the Pope--to hear them speak, he's kind of an upstart. They had a representative at the first meeting. He was called, I think, the papal delegate. It's the one that the Benedictines appoint each

year. This year it had been an American, and he was from someplace on the East Coast. He was sent to keep an eye on what the Vatican was doing.

Riess: It's interesting that Owings was that taken with Aalto and the Benedictines.

DeMars: I think that Mrs. Owings probably is a Catholic. I didn't ever get it quite straight.

Riess: No.

DeMars: No? Oh, I see. Hmm. Well, would he be?

Riess: I think he was very taken with things spiritual towards the end of his life. He was interested in the Hopi dances and would return over and over to them. And he was involved in reconstruction of some of the Catholic churches in the Taos area. I think that he was seeking the spiritual connection, I think there was that in it for him.²

DeMars: At this event they also dedicated a plaque. First it was anonymous, the gift that built the library--the million and a half or something. But he had passed on, in the meantime, and they had a plaque in the library for the donors, Howard and Jean Vollum.

² See oral history interview with Margaret Wentworth Owings, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.

XXI LAST QUESTIONS, FINAL THOUGHTS

Running an Architectural Firm--DeMars and...##

Riess: Now we should talk about how you ran your office. Over the years, what was the most workable arrangement? Were you burdened by the need to generate work for an expanding staff? How did the office change as a result of technology?

DeMars: I think I've mentioned that on a modest project, I'm capable of doing drafting. In fact, I was a pretty good draftsman after I learned a bit more about it. For instance, I did all the working drawings of my own house here, which means I could change it while it was going on, and a couple of other times. Each time I did it, I would enjoy it.

When John Wells, who was my second partner--he had been a former student--came in, he brought shortly thereafter another classmate, Ed Bennett. I don't know if I remember him from school or not, but it seems to me he's been with us from the beginning. He's still with John Wells. He's an excellent draftsman, enjoys doing that, and supervising other draftsmen--and women, and we have had several.

Ed also enjoys going out and doing supervision in the field. He doesn't want any further responsibility--didn't want to be a chief designing architect of projects. He just is an expert in doing what he does and didn't have any urge to have more responsibility than that. He knows how to do all the Rube Goldberg things that make something work, although there were times when I might not agree with some of them. Sometimes we changed them. Usually he could convince me, but I would have no loss of confidence that it would work, that he would carry the idea through to the intention--if you look at it now and then.

In a way, I suppose I'm leading to this thing of the ideal office situation. It isn't that I can't do or don't understand some of the technical things, although I don't know very much

about generators and a lot of electrical stuff. I don't know a lot about heat loss except the general principle. I want the stuff to work. I suspect a little bit I felt so confident after seeing that Aalto didn't draw everything that he does. That's what you have these other people for. You're not breathing down their neck every moment, but again it's tedious and long sometimes to pursue one thing. It means you can't do anything else while you're doing that.

This is why, if you have a lot of work you really need other people so that somebody can be in charge of that. Then you have meetings occasionally, and they pursue the next thing that has to be part of the total picture. Someone has to coordinate it and so on. When we had a medium-sized office, we had some rather big work. We would have a dozen projects at a time, which meant that some people could have a couple of them. But when you're only on your own, even if you go out to do an errand, nothing is being drawn while you're out. That really is a great limitation. You just can't do it all yourself. This is more or less what Jack Hilmer does, really. I don't know that he's ever had a draftsman.

Riess: It sounds like you are saying that you are nearly capable of doing it all yourself, and that that is tempting.

DeMars: I would say nearly, but not quite nearly. [chuckles] I know enough engineering to have an intuition about what looks feasible and what doesn't look feasible. I've long since forgotten the arithmetic that does it.

Riess: But what is the ideal office configuration for you?

DeMars: Well, my ideal is to have someone pretty much like John Wells, who had sufficient lack of confidence in his own design abilities--which was somewhat ungrounded. Really, he has rather good taste about a number of things. I'm trying to describe someone who then backs you up, you see, carrying out things--not just a rough whim you have of something--and who can be convinced, or agrees with your general direction, but also is in a position to tell you he doesn't like what you're doing, or this is why it doesn't work, and who is not afraid to tell you that. God knows that no one's afraid of me! I don't think, anyway! [laughs]

Then there are the building codes and government regulations such as the FHA when it's involved, and all the considerations under redevelopment. I was not ignorant of all these, but you have to have someone who knows and remembers the fine print and how to interpret it.

Riess: When you get around to a larger project it sounds like you have to have lots of highly specialized people ready. You also need to have lawyers to defend you against the suits that are going to rain down around your head if you do something wrong. How do you cope with that?

DeMars: We were at the beginning of that legal responsibility thing. We had this attorney, my same age, maybe younger, a family friend who also was attorney for several other architects, so was already familiar with the kind of legal problems architects get into. When we would be doing contracts and things he would help, although John Wells was very good in going through the standard forms that we had to use. But we would want to check it over with our attorney, and have one to work with when problems come up, someone to step in at those points. We had several times when we had to do this sort of thing.

Riess: Did you ever get into any arbitration with the University?

DeMars: No. And as a matter of fact, I think considering all the work that we did when Louis DeMonte was the campus architect-- . Although there were these other committees and so forth, he was the middle man between us. He was a classmate and architect himself. He told you what he thought about things as well, and was in a position to say no about things that were going on, or even that you were doing. He was very good, and you didn't find yourself caught up in the middle of all the conflicting committees and things. He had resolved this before they got to you, which was fine.

With the turnover of people I don't sense an architectural planner strongly in charge. Of course, I'm not now in the position where I'm dealing with the current long-range plan or with the architects other than where I've stuck my nose in. And I have a pretty hard time even getting my nose in currently. It's almost impossible to talk to the planner. He was on our faculty for a while. I was partly responsible for hiring him on the faculty--and for letting him go off the faculty. [chuckles] When I get through his screening of the number of people--where he has "no time in the next two weeks"--he's perfectly cordial.

Riess: Who is this?

DeMars: This is Bill Liskamm, William Liskamm. He is the campus planner now. He has been absolutely snowed with the involvement in the long-range plan, and his office there, and so on. There's so much going on.

Riess: But it was a different day with DeMonte.

DeMars: I think it was a different day.

Riess: It was not so litigious?

DeMars: No, it wasn't quite. Some of the University's attorneys on contracts and things were not as suspicious and litigious themselves. Now they drive such hard bargains on fees and contractual responsibilities it frightens off a lot of people who sometimes would just as soon not be involved.

I wouldn't have said that at the time. I would say that the whole student center, all the buildings, was very smooth. I don't recall any instances of real difficulty. We just went along, and we didn't have great overruns in cost. In fact, I don't know if we had any. Of course, there are always going to be a few little changes. I think that ours was not--it's a thing you try to avoid.

Riess: So it sounds like it would be hard to have a small firm.

DeMars: Yes. There's a little architectural firm right down on College, across from the movies, called Dipoli and something else [DiNapoli and Berger]. It's a little hole-in-the-wall place, can't be more than twelve feet across and goes back quite a depth. I think there's an upstairs piece. They can't possibly have more than about six or seven draftsmen besides themselves. You can do quite a bit of work with that. There's a secretary. I just get this by peeking in the window, and I know them. There's a big project, models and things--I thought it looked like Monterey--I saw in their window. "Gee, they've got some big ideas, these guys. I wonder how recently they graduated?" and so forth.

So help me, when I was down in Monterey at that architects conference, this thing has been built there. It crosses the street with a bridge, and it must have five hundred rooms or something. It looks kind of like a cross between the Claremont Hotel, but modernized with pitched roofs, and eastern wharf things going out and all this. They must have connections or something, but I'd say they're very good. [laughs]

Riess: So, you had a partner and what--six or seven draftsmen?

DeMars: I would say at one point we had twenty. That was when we had the Golden Gateway going, and half a dozen other projects.

Riess: Did you have one who was office manager?

DeMars: John Wells was the office manager. Then, in the hierarchy of things, Ed Bennett would have been called the chief draftsman, and Jack Bogan the job captain. I would also say that you need someone as a designer who can pursue your ideas, if you're juggling all these other balls. To do certain kinds of design you have to sit uninterrupted for hours at a time. That's almost impossible if you're one of the principals.

Riess: You were "doing lunch" all the time, weren't you?

DeMars: Well, that's what I or someone should have been doing for new work. Most of our work had come to us from work we had done and the reputation, or these competitions. We did win a number of important competitions all in a row, and that word gets around, so you get a few things. But it was really rather late in our whole operation when we were beginning to beat the bushes.

##

DeMars: I've mentioned Tom Aidala. He was part of the team of, I think it was, just four students that we got in for the competition for the student center. These students were our main draftsmen for that stage, and each one was sort of for that one building. We divided it up. Tom Aidala had the theater at that time, so we worked very closely together.

I had a whole bunch of ideas on the thing which pretty well were fixed both by the program. I found out that he was very competent and talented--a lot of imagination and fresh ideas. When we finally got the job to do Zellerbach Hall, and this came along about six years later, I think he was working in Rome at the time for Skidmore. I phoned him and said we had the job, and how soon could he come back and be on the team? He did as soon as he could.

We had another one, Wilber Weber--Bill Weber--who when he left us went and worked for Skidmore. He became one of their top designers. He had also been a student of mine. I could see from the start that he was very good. He would argue. [chuckles] Oh, we were practically at--well, not at blows. He got an "A" at the end of the semester, and I thought his work was excellent, but we really had some great arguments, which is good. Aidala knew him, and they had worked together on some things. He was the assistant designer to Aidala on the theater, and I worked with both of them.

We had a special room for them, because designers spend a lot of time making a mess, talking to each other, arguing, playing the radio or whatever. We finally outlawed radios in the office as such, because a lot of people are disturbed by it. So we had this little room. We didn't have a door to close it, but it was enough

isolated for model work and all this. Everybody accepted that. This was where the design was being beaten out. If it goes on right in the middle of the drafting room, it's too fascinating for everybody who's supposed to be--[laughs].

Oh, we would have Christmas parties, as they do, and have games and some prizes and other such events. It's a family, you know, but the work has to get out, too.

Riess: It's a family. That means your role is the father.

DeMars: Sort of.

Riess: And mother.

DeMars: Yes, and uncle. [laughs]

Department of Design and the College of Environmental Design

Riess: The design department was a subject of great interest and distress over the years. The legitimacy of it is often argued. It ended up in the College of Environmental Design. You've said that it made good sense there.

DeMars: Well, it wasn't just "ending up" there. I think that many of us would have thought that it was certainly part of the notion of environmental design. Many of the skills needed to approach problems of interior architecture--in fact, there are some schools that actually have that as a specialty, just interior architecture.

Riess: Interior spaces?

DeMars: Yes, and in some ways it almost gets missed in current architectural teaching.

Riess: You talked about the stages of planning the College of Environmental Design. But I don't remember hearing about anyone who was in design in particular.

DeMars: Well, you see, there was a planning department and a landscape department, and then there was the Department of Decorative Arts. That department was associated with household arts. But there were a number of people in that department who were really very much into weaving and fabrics and the history of furniture. Now, that might legitimately come in a curriculum that had a somewhat

broader umbrella over design as such. The first decorative arts thing, I don't know that students were even learning design or creative work. It was mostly history, and appreciation.

I think part of the problem was that some of those people then were brought over into the department. That wasn't the--. We thought that this might include such people when it really got going, but that it should be something in which the people in the design curriculum would take joint courses learning to draw, learning the skills of expression and so forth, learning what design is, how you approach it, whether for buildings or for any other thing.

Riess: You mean the people in the architecture curriculum would be taking classes in the design department?

DeMars: They might, but the people in design would be taking some of these initial courses, the tool courses with the architects. In fact, we thought, and I think it's beginning to happen now a bit, that the city planners probably ought to be able to know how to draw a chair or a table or a house or a horse or something. It wouldn't hurt them. We felt that all of them maybe should initially get acquainted by being together in some courses. One would be a history of design. They have such a course now. It's called ED 1, Environmental Design 1.

Riess: Environmental design is really different, isn't it, from design?

DeMars: Well, not necessarily. This is an aspect of it. We don't necessarily mean city planning as such. The College of Environmental Design includes architecture. It's one of the departments. Landscape architecture is one of the departments. City planning is a department, and we felt that design would be a department. These would all be independent in their profession, because in each case there is an isolated profession that deals with this. They lap over at the edges. But the lapping before was either accidental, or only when you got into trouble. We thought that if a group of people all had some joint background, they could talk to each other.

Riess: But it hasn't worked with the design department, has it?

DeMars: Well, not quite.

Riess: Why do you think that is?

DeMars: I think it hasn't been promoted by some of the deans we've had. We do have two or three people who teach drawing. [Anthony] Dubovsky teaches life drawing, sketching. There is a curriculum

in design, and I think it's under architecture now. Originally we thought there's enough historical background for it to be a department of itself.

Riess: Would there be any argument now for reviving it, as far as you're concerned?

DeMars: I think so. I think this is likely to go on with Roger Montgomery in that role. It depends on both the people that are there and the other people. We went through the process of interviewing people to come in and be the chairman of such a department, of people who had been designers for General Motors.

Riess: Ah! That's a different direction, isn't it? More industrial, the product side?

DeMars: We would assume that that might include this, some training in it, but not maybe as far as---. I visited a school in Los Angeles on a trip a year ago. I forget the name of it. It's a real professional trade school, and it's quite competent. They are doing industrial design, and I can see where the automobile designs are coming from. They're happening right now. It's all flashy, classy, and the kind of rendering they do with airbrush and stuff.

The industry itself defines the difference. They don't call it design, it's calling "styling." Design implies the concept, the purpose, the structure, the engineering, and the resultant image. The classic cars of a while back, the first Thunderbird, the Jaguar, the Porsche, even the Volkswagon and the Jeep, were really designed with a responsive aesthetic. Now the style, the inspiration, of many new designs seems to be to look mean, really sharklike, like Darth Vader from Star Wars.

I think it's Oregon where they have what is called "interior architecture." There is a young woman there, her background was architecture, but this curriculum is really the problems that you get on the interiors of buildings. That sort of eliminates, to some extent, the structural considerations, doesn't it? And I think they can be eliminated. You have to have some concept of it, but a lot of the technical things--I think if you're going to concentrate on that other thing--might be touched very lightly. It should be reviewed, but you would not have to be deeply competent to do the heating system of the interior of the house.

Riess: This is at the University of Oregon that they do this?

DeMars: Yes, and she's called a professor of interior architecture, I think.

Riess: That's interesting. I suppose Walter Landor would have been someone who could have taught.

DeMars: Yes. Well, he has been involved. Now, whether package design and so forth is it--. That is a question. This whole direction, consumer testing, we do it to an extent in architecture. We even have a sociologist in our department. You've met him. Russ Ellis. He would be interested in consumer testing, not as consumers so much as users, to some extent the thing that Chris Alexander has been doing in his own way, after his fashion.

Student Center. Details for the Record

[Interview 16: July 3, 1989]##

The Axe Case

Riess: We've got a few people and subjects left to talk about, some of which you have suggested. I don't care in what order we take them, but let's start with the Axe--it starts with the letter "A."

DeMars: The Axe. This goes back to the time that I was on the emergency board of the student center, from 1968 to 1970.

Riess: And why was that organized?

DeMars: I think it was felt by the administration and some others that the "representatives" of the students were being irresponsible in what they were doing with the vast funding that the student fees and the ASUC store bring into their laps, several million dollars a year. We had a slightly radical group that felt that the Cal Band, and other such things which have always been supported by student funds--these are part of the activities that one expects to have in college--they thought the money should go to the Mission Rebels in San Francisco and some other off-campus groups that had nothing to do with the University.

Riess: Traditional things were thought to be dispensable in favor of socially relevant activities.

DeMars: Yes, but that isn't what the funds necessarily were gotten together for. So anyway, they appointed a new chairman, Sam Markowitz, a faculty member. They still had the elected student reps from the ASUC on the committee, and they discussed things,

and they appropriated funds for various programs. The chairman had a veto, I think. I was included, maybe ex-officio--whatever the role, I was included. I was thought to be interested.

I was kind of impressed. One of the things--. Young Hallinan--I think this was Vincent, the present supervisor--was on the board. He didn't have a great deal to say, but I must say that he scared the pants off me in a way. [laughs] He was a dedicated radical at the time, very bright and so forth. I was both impressed and, I'm afraid, sort of overwhelmed by this guy.

Riess: Did he seem actually physically threatening?

DeMars: No, no.

Riess: He was just such a powerful ideologue or something like that?

DeMars: Yes, kind of. Not that he was holding the floor all the time at all, but maybe by reputation, or by association.

Anyway, the Axe story: There were two young fellows. Their names, at least one of them, could have come right out of Restoration comedy. One of them is John Welborne. Isn't that a great name? His very good friend was Jamie [James S.] Bennett. I think one was studying law, and the other one landed in public relations. John Welborne was very good-looking, blond and all this. He and his fraternity decided to see if they could steal the Stanford Axe. He went down there, wore a red sweater, and hung around a whole day so that he could be seen and thought to be a student. (I guess they did this all in one day.)

Stanford had a new case for their Axe. The case was made of wood and was hinged at the top and had a glass front. The Axe itself had burglar alarming that was connected to it, as did the glass. The case tilted out. It was hung with hinges at the top and then just screwed into the bottom. Later during the day he was able to take a peek, and he saw that the screws were simply Phillips head screws.

That night he hid in the janitor's closet. His fraternity brothers were outside with their car. I think about two a.m. he came out, unscrewed the screws from the bottom of the case, propped the case up with a broom handle from the janitor's closet, then propped open the outer door. The car was out on the curb not more than twenty-five feet away. The signal was all ready. He just took the Axe, jerked it out of the case, setting the alarm off, and ran to the car, and they headed off campus. Of course, two minutes later the police arrived, but they were gone.

What this whole story leads up to is they wanted to have a place where the Axe could be seen on our campus, and they came to me to help design the case for it, with John's "insider" instructions. The main thing was that you shouldn't be able to hang around to study what kind of a lock it has. This case was going to be made of steel, not wood. We considered where it could go, and so on.

Do you know where it is? It's right at the foot of the main stairs that go up to the Pauley Ballroom.

Riess: Right next to the Bear, and it's empty.

DeMars: Right, and it's empty, of course. There should be a light on it, and there should be something inside it--there could be a photo of the Axe.

Riess: Yes, it's unexplained as it is.

DeMars: Yes, and the trouble is, no one picks up these things. You see, he isn't around anymore.

So we designed this. It has a heavy glass front on it which doesn't get removed. The Axe is mounted on a wooden panel, and this is slid in from one side. There are two doors. The inner door has two elaborate Yale locks on it. Then there's a little door on the outside with a small desk kind of lock. You would have to have the key to open this up. Presumably, no one could open that up without looking suspicious. You couldn't even test out the Yale lock without being seen. Of course, then it has the burglar alarm on the case front, and it goes down through one of the legs.

The whole thing is made of steel, and on the top are pairs of decorative finials.

Riess: Yes, tell me about what that shape is.

DeMars: That's supposed to be a California poppy. That's the state flower, the golden poppy. On the Student Union it's the way Maybeck would have done them. He often didn't have much money to work with on things. If he wanted certain decorative effects, he would improvise something.

I wanted to give a little extra decorative feeling to that trellis on the Student Union. They are made of aluminum--a rather simple design. I worked it over myself, so it didn't take any elaborate fabrication. But there are four of them for each of the trellis supports, which consist of four steel posts. So there

must be a couple of hundred of them. If you enamel them with a clear varnish it looks like gold--and they still do, except when they're dirty.

The ones on top of the case I thought ought be made of wrought iron, or something with gold leaf. Oh, sure. [chuckles] I didn't realize they were going to cost a hundred dollars apiece, but that didn't seem to matter.

Riess: If you can't get the Axe, then take one of the poppies!

DeMars: That's not likely. They are welded to the tops of the posts.

But that's about the end of the story. I remember when Welborne graduated he gave a great sort of beer and champagne party in the eucalyptus grove for at least a hundred friends and others. Just a casual gesture! [laughs]

The Silent Glockenspiel

DeMars: We'll get to the glockenspiel later, but John Welborne and Jamie were intrigued with the notion of having a glockenspiel. They made a trip to Europe together, and I kept getting postcards back from them. They'd have a card of the great elaborate glockenspiel in Berne, and would write, "Did you ever think of having one of these?" Another from Munich with some witty comment.

Riess: Tell me about the glockenspiel.

DeMars: The glockenspiel was thought of not during the competition, that was a little bit much, but when we had models in the office of the whole center at a rather large scale, an eighth of an inch to the foot. The model was about seven by nine feet. We made a lot of decisions on this. (These models are not made to be shown to the public; they were made purely to study at this scale and see how the buildings related to each other and to test the ideas we had.)

Riess: The model was of the entire student center.

DeMars: Including a piece of Sproul Hall and a piece of the gymnasium.

On the face of Eshleman Hall, as you look coming down Bancroft, which is a one-way street, there is, off-center, a set of balconies. Those are due to Don McLaughlin. Asymmetrically down toward the street, lower level, seemed just the place for a great clock and a carillon, and a little episode of something

which goes with glockenspiels. This I worked on in my sort of hobby time.

Riess: What do you mean an "episode of something"?

DeMars: Well, the usual glockenspiel is a clock, and then there's a group of figures. There's one on St. Mark's in Venice.

Riess: The "episode" is a little event that happens with the figures?

DeMars: Yes. Sometimes just a little parade. Sometimes they're moving figures. The most spectacular one is in Munich. I got a postcard from the boys from there, too. It stops the traffic every day. It was done in the nineteenth century, but done as they would have done it [in medieval times]. Do you know it at all?

Riess: No.

DeMars: We need to take time out. [pause]

Riess: Now, please describe your episode. First the bear comes out from the right--

DeMars: --followed by the Indian, looking around, tracking him.

Riess: The Stanford Indian comes out looking for the bear and they both disappear on the left?

DeMars: Yes. Then the Indian comes out from the left, standing now. This is on a second track, you see. He's standing up, but he's followed by the bear standing, claws out, and they both disappear to the right. Then out of this side come the bear and the Indian in mortal combat. They're hinged, and I'll show you the model. They come out, they go back, and then they disappear. Finally, if we won the game that year, the bear comes out and he has the Stanford Axe, and the Indian's scalp.

Riess: The triumphant bear.

DeMars: Then, if they win, I think the Indian comes out with the Axe and he's dragging a bearskin behind him.

Riess: That's great. This is dated March 1967, when you were hard at work at it. We will include this drawing of the East Elevation showing the bells and the clock.

DeMars: When Betty and I were on this trip with Dick Erickson, on the Romanischestrasse, that's where I got these pictures of Rothenburg, which has a rather simple little episode up on the

gable of the medieval town hall. At the stroke of three, I think it was, two little windows fly open. On the left is the commander of the Swedish army that had laid siege to the city in the 1600s. He raises his baton as a signal for the city's mayor to start drinking a giant stein of beer. If he can do it in one continuous gulp, the Swedes will not hang the town council. Well, historically he got it down. So the Swedes didn't hang them. That done, the windows slam shut and the crowd of watchers--always there is a crowd--can go on about their business.

When I first got started on the glockenspiel idea I wanted to find out who builds them now, since you see them throughout Holland, Germany, and Switzerland. And someone was immediately sent to get in contact with us. The people who make glockenspiels had a representative here, and they knew I was going to Europe. "Fine, where are you going to be?" Frankfurt was about the closest to Holland, where they make bells, that we would be getting. The head of this company in Amsterdam drove down to see me. We were staying at the castle Kaiser Wilhelm had built for his mother. The other people were out touring, so we had lunch on the terrace. This young man came down to talk to us about what it would cost, how many bells, and so on.

Riess: Did you have any kind of go-ahead?

DeMars: No, no.

Riess: You were just bringing back information.

DeMars: I was just exploring, hoping that someone might raise the funds.

Riess: Did you find out how much it would cost?

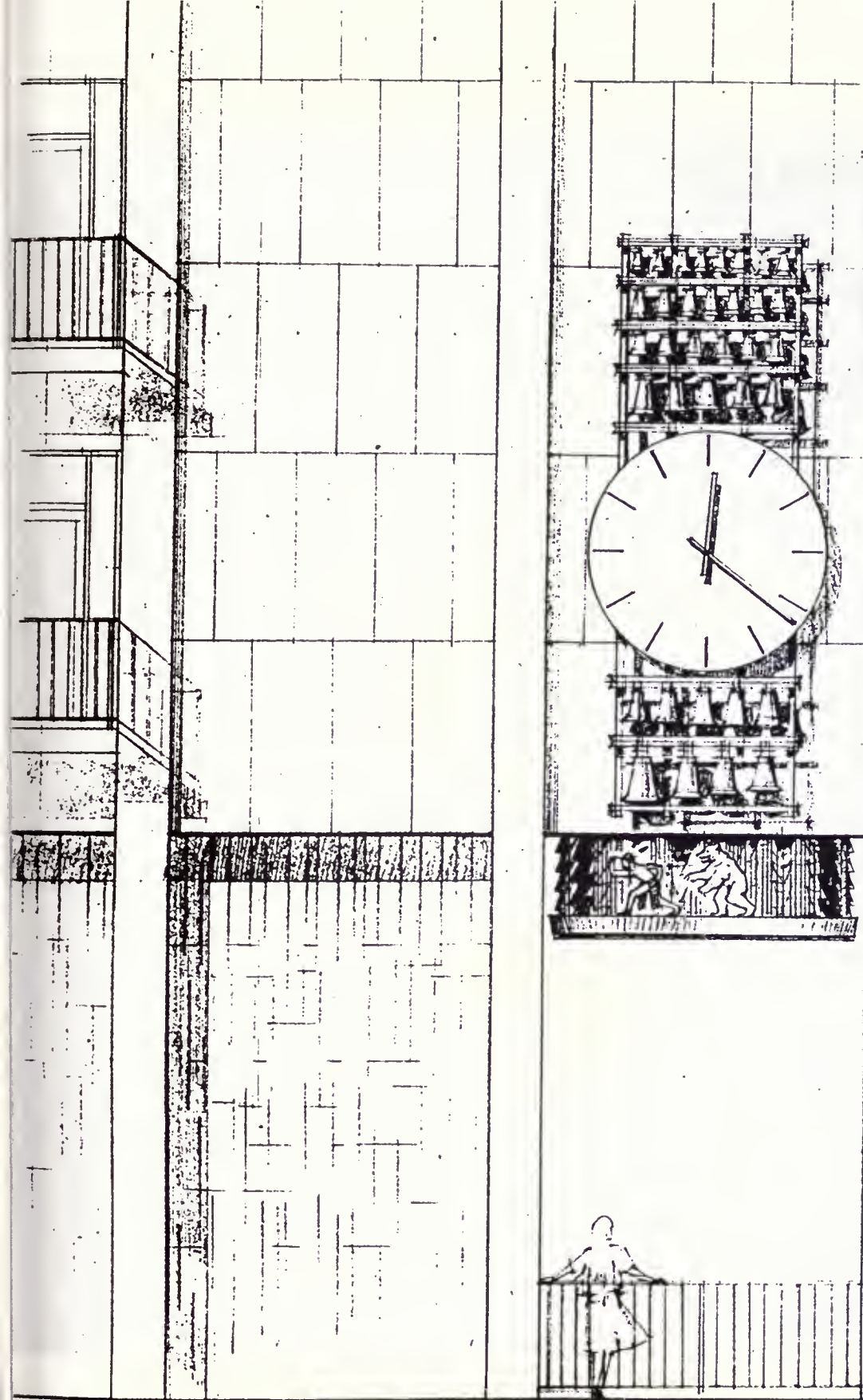
DeMars: Well, about that time it was going to cost thirty-five or forty thousand [dollars].

Riess: Did you go any further with it?

DeMars: No, because when Stanford dropped the Indian I wasn't able to think of another scenario. [chuckles] I dropped it--busy with other things, I suppose. Obviously something else could take place, a procession of campus characters perhaps.

Riess: But there hasn't been any follow-through?

DeMars: No follow-through. But I never give up. I'll get to it again.



7'-9"

22'-6"

2'-6"

14'-6"

EAST ELEVATION



Class of 1929 Golden Bear sculpture for Zellerbach Plaza, with architect Vernon DeMars (left) and sculptor Tom Hardy (front). Members of class gift committee in rear: Harold R. Breakenridge (left), William Price, and Richard Railton.

Bear in the Air

Riess: Let's go to the bear.

DeMars: I think we discussed earlier that the image we had for what we wanted to do with the main plaza was the Piazza San Marco in Venice. We had a plan of the piazza on the wall. Someone had a copy of it and brought it in. This was kind of our inspiration. We were trying to get this to be that kind of a place.

In Venice there are these two columns, and one of them has the symbol of the city, which is the Winged Lion of St. Mark's, on the top of this high column. We said, "Wouldn't it be great to have the symbol of the state, and of the University, a golden bear, on a column high enough up so you can't get at it easily."

So then, where would it go? Well, it should be just as it is in San Marco. In a way there is an opening from the buildings where you look at the sea beyond, so that you can see it against this clear background. In our case, we found a place where if you entered the square from the Bancroft area, the bear would be seen against the trees of the eucalyptus grove, and that would be in that opening.

There was no money to do it originally. But we thought sometime we might get a class to come up with this. And I was busy with other things, I guess. But one day I was shopping at the Star Grocery. This had to be late in '77. I had two big bundles of groceries, and I had just paid my bill at the cash register. An architect whom I knew from school days, Ned Maher--he was two years ahead of me and we would see each other now and then and once in a while cross paths at the Star Grocery--he said, "DeMars! Do you know an architect from the Class of '29?"

I said, "Why?"

He said, "They want to do something for a class gift, and want to find an architect to draw up something for them."

I said, "Well, I'm from the Class of '29, as a matter of fact, even though I didn't graduate when I should have."

"Well, come with me, right away!"

So he takes me out onto the street in front where, parked in a car, is "Whif" Railton--Richard [S.] Railton--and his wife. I think they had driven him down to do his shopping for some reason. He introduced me to them. Whif was sitting in the driver's seat

in the car. I put my two bags of groceries on top of the car and he explains what it's about, that they want to do a class gift, and the University had proposed that they do a gate at the north end of the campus. He said, "We want to have some idea of what it might be like and to get an idea of what it might cost."

I said, "Well, sure, I would be glad to help on this. I even have thought of a gate there myself," or something. As we talked on, they didn't seem to be very enthusiastic. He said, "They're proposing it. It doesn't sound like a very interesting thing."

I said, "Well, I have something that you might be interested in," and I described the proposal of the bear and the student center. (There wasn't a prominent large bear really anywhere on campus, and needless to say I was hoping that this sculpture would be so good it would become the one referred to all the time. In some ways, it didn't turn out that way.) But anyway, to go further into it, we talked about it.

I had a model of it that I was able to show, and we had another meeting. I said, "I have another thing that we had thought of doing on Eshleman Hall at one time, a glockenspiel." Well, they were interested in both of them. They had a committee, and I made a presentation at a lunch over at the St. Francis Yacht Club.

Riess: The bear was your drawing, or did you have a model?

DeMars: I had a model already.

Riess: I know, but you didn't have the sculptor selected?

DeMars: Well, I did. Tom Hardy was teaching at UC when we were doing the student center. I had met him. He had a good exhibit of his work over in the courtyard of the old architecture building. I thought it was particularly interesting, because he did animals and things. He did a great buffalo out of steel with an acetylene torch. He also had a tiger that I was impressed with. There was nothing but the tiger stripes--these strips, you see, made the whole tiger.

I thought, "Now this is the guy. He could do a bear." It wouldn't be sentimental like the one that did the cute bears in sculpture--Benny Bufano. I felt that was not the kind of bear we wanted. It had to be definitely a bear, and the bear that we have on the flag.

Riess: So how did they decide between the two projects?

DeMars: They saw the two demonstrated--I have a working model of the glockenspiel, which I'll show you as you leave--and they decided on the bear. That seemed safer, I guess, in their minds. I thought under the circumstances maybe it was a more sensible thing for their case, but Stanford still had Indians then. [chuckles] We also didn't have the complete carillon on the Campanile at that time. All of these things sort of pulled the rug out from under part of the idea of the glockenspiel. So, it got going in this way.

To end the story, I should add in here that they didn't raise enough money in the first year to get it in place in '79; I think it had to go over into '80. The funds were raised in '79. That would be the fiftieth anniversary of the class. The other interesting thing: all these people that were the prime objects of fundraising, and some of the people on the committee--these were all the BMOs [Big Men on Campus] who I wouldn't have known when I was on campus. But they seemed like perfectly decent people, and so forth, and took me into their midst. [laughs]

For instance, the Class of '29 included William Randolph Hearst, Jr., who is now the Examiner's editor in the East. Also, Melvin Belli was a member, and a fraternity brother of Melvin Belli's was Harry Cobden. We knew him because of Jimmy and Merle Garthwaite that we used to do folkdancing with. He's the one that got me into the Bohemian Club. A close friend and neighbor of theirs was Joseph Henry Jackson on the Chronicle. He used to come to some of our New Year's square dances. His wife, Charlotte Jackson, was the sister of Harry Cobden.

Harry Cobden and Belli were buddies, and apparently they used to get themselves pretty tanked up on a Saturday night, and drop in on sororities. They dropped in on my wife's sorority, which was Delta Zeta, and really raised absolute hell. They finally got them out of there, and I think it was--if I haven't gotten the story mixed up--there was a solid front door, but there were two sidelights, and Belli walked through one of the sidelights instead of the front door. Apparently, it didn't harm him.

This leads up to the fact that one of the fundraiser luncheons for the bear and the column was held over in the University Club in San Francisco. Belli was there. I had never met him, but I knew all about him. There was some introduction, and I said, "I think we have a mutual friend, Harry Cobden." He said, "That son-of-a-bitch! Where is he now? What is he doing now?" [laughs] I was sort of taken aback. He said, "I guess I shouldn't have said that. But, you know, we had our ins and our outs," or something like that. [laughs] That was Belli.

Let's see. What else happened?

Riess: I shouldn't think that with some of those names that there would have been trouble raising funds.

DeMars: Well, they had to raise \$75,000. Whif Railton--I call him "Whif" because everybody does--was apparently close, in the same fraternity, with Will Hearst. We would meet every other week or so to get the reports of how progress was going. We didn't even start on the sculpture thing until they got the fundraising going along.

Riess: Did you get any pressure from the University to do something like provide money for a chair, which seems to be the way things are going these days, rather than a bear?

DeMars: Yes. As a matter of fact, this group has gone on and has provided money for a chair. I think classes also like to have something visible. They've raised quite a bit more than the seventy-five.

But Whif was telling us that he was in touch with Will Hearst, and Hearst said, "Well, look. Why don't you just wait until you're getting in trouble toward the end. If you do it now, it will go into the Hearst Foundation, and you'll get a token amount to get rid of you. Just wait until where I can be a hero." So, when it was about time to be a hero, he came through with twenty-five thousand.

I'll finish on this. So we were able to move ahead. The sculpture was underway. The column was a bit of an engineering problem in itself. I did the complete drawings. I had an engineer friend look at it and make some proposals.

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Riess: Okay, so you had the base cast in one piece.

DeMars: It took a couple of trips, and it took some consultation on how they would cast it. There were problems in that--there are always problems--and it isn't exactly the color that they said they would do. When I went down to check the color thing, they "lost" the sample that had been approved. This was only days before it was due to be installed.

It was moved onto the site about three days before the luncheon that was going to dedicate it. Hearst was flying out from the East to be at the luncheon in the Pauley Ballroom. The bear arrived, I think, just the day before. We already had a forklift, one of these so-called "cherry-picker" trucks to lift

the bear up. We had it all laid out. I had it scheduled by the hour to get this thing up. I was frantic until Tom Hardy arrived. He drove it down in his truck. It got lifted on the night before the luncheon, and we draped a parachute over it to make a drape.

The next day they were still patching things up. It was almost ready to go. The chairs were on in the plaza, and people were already beginning to gather, and the cherry-picker was still there! They started to drive it off and it was out of gas! Someone went and got some gas. Then the spark wouldn't catch! Luckily, the electrician who had just finished the electrical work was still there and they ran down and got him as he was driving off the plaza. He backed up. Most of the gathering was already there, and here was this damn thing right behind the column, messing everything up. He got in it, jumped the thing, it picked up, they drove it off to the applause of the crowd! [laughter]

Riess: That's so funny.

DeMars: It really is. Then the band came out and played "Our Sturdy Golden Bear."

Riess: Splendid. My goodness, the eleventh hour!

DeMars: That's the way those things go.

Commemorating FSM

Riess: Now, you wanted to say something about the last little touch in the Student Union plaza, the commemoration of the Free Speech Movement. This is something that's come up in the last year, that there should be a plaque to commemorate that period of University history.

DeMars: Yes, because this is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the time that the Free Speech thing started in Sproul Plaza. There's a group that is raising funds for it.

Riess: Is it a group of dissidents or former dissidents?

DeMars: No, no, these are professors on campus, with others. In fact, one of the people invited to be on the committee was Mario Savio, who graciously declined.

It started from a couple of people who were involved at the time who felt there could be a little plaque of some sort

commemorating the event. They were students at that time, or graduate students. One of them is Brad Cleaveland, who wrote this sort of "Mein Kampf," as I call it. I have a copy of it. They were running SLATE, if you remember, and that was a call to arms, practically, that came out the summer before the Free Speech Movement started. That's another story, but briefly, the events followed his script to the letter, even the charge, "Get the president of the University fired!"

Anyway, they were proposing something modest and simple, just an historical marker, a plaque. The art community now has gotten hold of it, and they want a major work of art which will be commissioned, with a competition.

Riess: What's the art community? What do you mean by that? Peter Selz?

DeMars: Peter Selz is the chairman of the group. [pause]

Riess: [reading] It is "an ad hoc committee for the purpose of raising funds and commissioning a major work of outdoor art for the Berkeley campus in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Free Speech Movement." That is 1989. It's Peter Selz, Leon Litwack, Charles Schwartz, Anne Healy, George Lakoff, Susan Ervin-Tripp, Arthur Gill, William Chinowsky, and Troy Duster. These are all very familiar names, yes.

I know that this project troubles you in some ways. What is it that bothers you?

DeMars: The thing that bothers me a little bit is that this is what they call a "site-specific" work. Unless someone is very familiar with the site, it's going to be important to be sure that they have enough information to see what's appropriate. Sproul Plaza is still a meeting place. It's like an auditorium, in a sense--an outdoor one. Putting a large sculpture or something in the middle of it, or to say you can't have it in the middle, or where should it be, almost anyplace in it is going to be in the way of its use, I'm afraid. So it has to be sort of set off.

However, since I first had this very negative feeling, I have thought of something, which I'm going to keep a secret. I might even enter it myself, [chuckles] in due course.

Several people that I've talked to about it say, "Why don't they just have a plaque where the car was with Mario Savio on top?" I've thought a plaque would be an appropriate thing.

Riess: Set in the--

DeMars: Set in the pavement, and the plaque might just say this--in describing the site, the wording they've used here is almost, I think, perfect for it--[reading] "It was here that in 1964 the Free Speech Movement had its origin, and it was in Sproul Plaza that the worldwide political and social protest movements had their beginnings, eventually spreading across the United States as well as internationally." That tells the whole story. I can't imagine a sentimental statue of a student shaking his fist or giving a speech, or a total abstraction--though if Noguchi were around still, he might come up with the proper thing, but I think it still needs this explanation, this terminology.¹

¹ [Note added by DeMars in November 1991]. The competition was held as planned in 1989, and I did make a submission with Don Reay. So did some two hundred others. The jury had a broad representation of concerns and interests--a respected museum curator from the East, local and national artists, students. They selected five--ours not among them--and put them on public display with ballots for viewers to vote. The winner, both the jury's and public vote, was a conceptual entry, which I will describe, but which leaves me deeply puzzled as to the state of "Art," particularly public art as understood by performers and viewers in our time.

The winning work is "conceptual," the most avant guard current art fad. Pro: In its favor it will do little harm to the environment and may soon go unnoticed. Con: It really has nothing to do with the purpose of commemoration and touching on the subject of free speech; its message is anarchic, and the opposite of what the FSM was about.

I will describe it: There would be a marble disc about three feet in diameter set flush in the brick pavement of Sproul Plaza. In its center would be a six inch hole filled with dirt. Around the edge would be a statement to the effect: "This circle of earth, its extension below, and the column of air above it, belongs to no nation."

Half of the \$75,000 award would go to hire attorneys to take the declaration to the highest authorities of the land to have the statement sanctified as legal. The message I get from that is that free speech is not possible in these United States, only in such a symbolic place on earth and the air above it. So much for art in our time! It has not yet been approved by the past or present chancellor or the Regents, both necessary to its completion.

Tilden Meditation Room

Riess: You also wanted to give some background on the Tilden Meditation Room in the Student Union?

DeMars: Yes. A meditation room was called for in the competition program. We weren't quite sure what a meditation room was. Originally we visualized a little Japanese garden where you meditate, sit cross-legged, and look into a pool. Later, when we met and talked with Mrs. [Douglas Lee] Tilden, she said they had really had in mind a little Gothic chapel down in some place like the eucalyptus grove, this sort of thing.

Riess: They were giving a hundred thousand dollars.

DeMars: Yes, and ten thousand of that would be for a work of art.

I don't think they said it should be on the roof or whatever, but we thought that a kind of a penthouse situation with a little garden would make some sense. The more we talked about that, we thought, "Well, if they want something Gothic we have these umbrella-like concrete shells that occur elsewhere in the student center, where they form the roof of the dining commons, and of the bridge that connects it to the student union. They already fit the twenty-four foot module that spaces the structural supports for everything in the student center.

[Robert] Pinard, the sculptor, did some windows for Hertz Hall, which she liked. So that was set. But, "Would we mind if she suggested the subject?" She wanted the poem "Abou Ben Adhem, (may his tribe increase!)." Tom Aidala, whom I've mentioned before, did a beautiful piece of calligraphy of the poem on a heavy slab of hardwood on the concrete block wall on your left as you enter. And I don't know if you discovered "the angel in the great flash of light" on one side of the window.

Riess: No.

DeMars: You have to have it called to your attention. My only concern, as the final thing, in the impression that it's rather overpowering in that space. It really should have been in a bigger space.

Riess: You mean that glass, that piece of window?

DeMars: The glass--that big, and when it's bright, it's almost too bright. I've often thought of proposing a kind of a curtain that would soften it at times. We could adjust it, if it were dusk or something. Maybe it would be hanging on the outside.

In the beginning we had some beautiful separate chairs there in rows with rush seats. They lasted for several years. I don't know why they had to roughhouse the place, but they finally busted up those seats. Now some groups want to sit on the floor and so on. I think it's just used as another room which happens to be there.

You couldn't imagine the number of things that went wrong in getting what you finally see there. The artist--we agreed on the designs and so forth--he was having this made in Munich. It is heavy glass; it's not in lead, it's in cement. He went over and got the separate panels put together, and then they were boxed and shipped here. There must have been, I guess, about fifteen crates.

We were wise enough that we had a contractor to install them. Of course, the structure of the wall was already there. There were steel H-columns, small ones, but in an "H" shape. It had been filled in with plywood for several years until we got around to getting this thing done.

We had figured out how it would get in. The panels would be just enough narrower than the space in between that when you slip one side into the hollow part of the "H," there's room enough to get it into the other "H," if you can visualize this. We also had sense enough--that was my friend, John Wells, who said, "We'd better have him make the measurements for the size of these pieces. It's his responsibility to receive them and to set them in place in the wall."

It arrived, and we got a phone call. The crew were unpacking the crates, and the first four crates they opened, the glass was broken, cracks through this glass. Now, this glass is about an inch to an inch and a half thick, a lot of it. So, "Oh, my God." We opened a few more crates, and in at least every other crate, there were pieces of broken glass in it.

We had a conference. We phoned Pinard in New York. He didn't seem to be terribly upset, but he would come out. He said to go ahead and install them, because they had the crew and everything else. He had in mind a way to fix them. (What he was going to do was since there were already a lot of lines across glass, he would simply draw with epoxy a line over where the cracks were. That's the way he did it. That was decided.)

The next day the crew was up there to start installing it, but the panels were too big. They wouldn't fit between the columns. "Oh, my God, what do we do now?" I don't know who it

was, one of the men or John Wells or whoever, made a suggestion. There were forty panels, and they were stacked about six or eight high, so they would cut a little notch in one side of the H-column at the very top so that you could get the panel in. You would lower them all down through this top thing. After they were all in and cemented into place, then you would weld in this patch where you had cut to get them in.

So that's the way it was done. As I say, everything that could happen wrong did, step by step. Each time, it seemed like total disaster.

Betty DeMars and Her Artistry

Riess: Your wife Betty was an artist, and did costume design when you met. Did she continue with that after you were married?

DeMars: She did stitchery. She was also a creative artist. But she said at an early stage that she felt she didn't have any message for the world as far as being a painter. She was a graduate in art, had a master's in art, and studied all the different media and so forth, did egg tempera, some trial runs at it. She had a Diego Rivera period, and she had several others.

She just decided that she didn't have any sort of great, deep earthshaking--or enigmatic, which was even more important, I guess, though I don't know if she would have used that word, but that's, I think what she meant--kind of message that the artist can't explain, but by his art you can tell what it is. She just enjoyed design and patterning and so forth.

I think she enjoyed the stitchery business and found reasons and ways to do it. She would go to her mother's bridge club and bring along a little square of muslin, about a foot square, and do some patchwork stitchery of some sort on it. I saw these things mounting. I didn't quite know what she was going to do with them. I don't even think that she told me what she had in mind. I sort of felt if she wanted to discuss it with me, she would. She didn't often ask me, "What do you think about so-and-so?" or "Should I do this?"

When we were doing the banners [for Zellerbach Hall] we discussed some that hadn't been done yet. The ones she was doing, she just picked up and did it. I very soon learned if I didn't like it, I would learn to like it. That is to say, there were a couple of them where I thought, "Gee, I don't think much of that."

Now, I think they're among the greatest. She had a marvelous sense of design and patterning.

Riess: Was that actually a commission, to do the banners?

DeMars: It was a little bit like some of these other things. We were hoping to get some funds from the University or the development people for a work of art that would be part of the thing. There was just no money. There wasn't a penny in the whole Zellerbach Hall thing for this. It was in at the first, and maybe I didn't work it right. As we talked about it--we had already started--I thought I could get the money.

Riess: As you started on the banners?

DeMars: As we started doing it. We just decided we were going to provide for it, and that I would see that there were flagpoles. And what would it be like? There would be ten of them. Maybe I wasn't trying too hard to get this. We talked it over one day. She said, "Why don't we just give them to the University? Then we don't have someone telling us they don't like this or, 'Why don't you do that?' or whatever." I said, "You know, I think it's a good idea, because we would have to have a committee and all this sort of thing." So that settled that easily.

Among other things she did--. While I was on the board of the San Francisco Museum, every Christmas they would have a Christmas tree contest, and she would do these, and she would always get me to take pictures of them, Kodachrome, so I have a good record. She did at least six or eight Christmas trees, very imaginative things, one made out of egg cartons cut up--not the kind that go this way [gestures] but the shapes that she cut out. She would paint them and glue them and have other things. Another one was made of some kind of little puff balls of stuff, or feathers. She had all kinds of things worked into them.

Riess: Did she do her work right here in the house?

DeMars: Yes, but she never really--I think this was completely turned over to her when we did the banners.

Riess: You mean the balcony area.

DeMars: The balcony area up there. She really wished she had a studio she could mess up. She really should have raised more hell about it and made me do it, which I would. She didn't come out quite that strongly, and I thought, "Well, there's a place to work."

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DeMars: What I was going to say on these Christmas trees: she got first prize several years in a row. Then she decided that she was running out of ideas on the Christmas trees, or at least thought she had done enough of them, so she did some banners to hang over the fireplace. These are all the things that you could really use in your household, and you could make a very nice mantelpiece decoration. She would do a banner of a tree so wide and so long. They were beautiful, just marvelous.

Riess: Did she sell them?

DeMars: No. These were for the museum, and then the museum sold them.

Riess: So she didn't have the satisfaction of exhibiting and marketing her art.

DeMars: Well, except on those occasions. Her banners got to be known. Stitchery and quilts are really big stuff now, but she was doing it when hardly anybody else was. But there was enough of it going on that there was a big show at the Claremont Hotel. They had two of her banners there and they were really quite the talk of the town. They were shown at the Oakland Museum one year.

She talked about selling--this was just the last couple of years. She'd like to have sold them. Well, we didn't need the money, except for the fact, I guess, that there would have been a satisfaction that she could have gotten that they were worth x amount. We were able, for our gift of the banners, to get a tax credit on them, and we tried them at a thousand dollars apiece. That was ten thousand dollars. Other people have said, "You'd never get it done for that today."

It's true. When you see what Warhol and some others-- others, others, others. It's all in the name, the rarity of a stamp, an airplane upside-down, you see. Is it the aesthetics of it that makes it worth so much? No, it's the rarity. A guy who's produced a lot of work and whose work sells for this--. Among the moderns, it's really almost outrageous.

Just to finish on this, have you seen the David Park show?

Riess: Yes.

DeMars: Do you like the Park things?

Riess: Yes, very much.

DeMars: I do, too.

Riess: Did you know Park?

DeMars: I knew him, although not terribly well, and his wife [Lydia] who was on the campus at the same time [Lydia Park worked in the UC Berkeley Library]. In fact, I was looking at the list to see if he was ever in the English Club or the Arts Club. He might have been before me. [David Park was not a student at Berkeley. ed.] We sort of had mutual friends. I liked him as a person.

Taking and Giving Criticism

Riess: You and your wife were two creative people in the same household, and you probably were bringing home the work that you were thinking about and some of your drawings. Did you ask her for her opinion? Was she free to give it? You've suggested that you took your cue early, that you probably should just moderate what you had to say about her work or else she was not going to show it to you because she didn't want to have some heavy-duty critique. Did you feel the same way about something that you were just developing?

DeMars: No, I wouldn't say so. I'm sure that I asked for an opinion on things. I didn't necessarily. Well, I'm sure I brought home some work. I've discussed things that we were doing and so forth, and she was interested. I don't know whether I would say, "Well, what do you think about it?" before she would come out--. I think she would, beginning to have doubts or something, say, "Well, what are you doing this for?" or some such a thing. I think we were at ease in discussing things of this sort.

Riess: I think it can be touchy.

DeMars: Sure, yes.

Riess: Do you think that you've changed your direction sometimes because of her?

DeMars: I would say we were taught it in school--not taught it, but just by working on things, you want to get a critique. It's one of the ongoing terms among architects. It can be on anything. It can be on the functionalism of looking at the thing. It's the same thing the professor gives the student. In between time, the student gets his closest friend or a senior student in a class.

Riess: So you learn to be open to this.

DeMars: Yes. Oh, very much.

Riess: You learn that that's part of the process.

DeMars: And that you would study the design.

Riess: Then maybe that's a difference between artists and architects. I don't think artists are interested in being criticized halfway through a project.

DeMars: No, I think you're right. I think, particularly now, it's the idea that you've gotten yourself worked up into the thing, and it's come as an inspiration, and you slap it on or something, and "you can't explain it." That seems to be, so much of the time, the explanation of what's going on. Like, who is it? The great cornet player, Louis Armstrong, an Englishman was asking him about jazz or something. "If you don't dig it, I can't explain it to you." [laughs] I think that was more or less the essence of it.

Riess: So you would say that that's the artistic response: "If you don't dig it, I can't explain it to you." But the architect makes it his business to be rational about what he's doing from the outset.

DeMars: And that it's subject to criticism at any level, which he can weigh and discard. He may also say, "Oh, yes, of course. Yes, that's a good idea," or "I'll think about it." Then he might go and really think about it and change some things, because it [architecture] is awfully permanent. I think it comes sort of through that. You're not going to risk finding out after it's too late that if you had only done so-and-so--.

You have different kinds of opinions. I know one of the things they would tell about Eero Saarinen was that he would ask everybody in his office, including the janitor, what he thought of this thing going through. That's one reason, probably, each of his projects looks so different.

In one sense, Picasso was always interested in exploring other things, although you can always tell it's a Picasso, because the signature is so much there, isn't it? He could just draw several lines on a piece of paper, and you could tell it was a Picasso.

Riess: Yes, but I think we all accept the notion that Picasso was a self-starter, that it wasn't his wife who was saying to him, "Why don't you consider doing it in blue?"

DeMars: Yes, right. If they did that, the one he had just done, he tears it off, doesn't throw it away, and does another one! [laughs]
 [pause] We took little vacations. We went down to the Indian country, and we went to plays. She liked music, as I did. We really had many things in common. She read more than I did, and we discussed the things. If she thought I would like it she'd get me to read it, and we would have that to talk about. She was a good critic of dramas, or movies, or whatever, and I usually agreed with her on these things. We were just very much-- [chuckles]. If I didn't agree, I didn't want to turn her off. I'd rather keep her guessing a little bit about what I liked or didn't like. I'm rather open. I don't have too many dislikes, but the occasional ones I don't mind being somewhat strong about.

Vernon DeMars: Impresario and Preservationist

Riess: Were you a workaholic, would you say?

DeMars: Only to the extent that I liked to get totally involved in something.

I didn't have to be working all the time, but I enjoyed the push, the charette that architects have. It's like in theater: you have a deadline, it's got to be done. That same kind of excitement. I've often thought of an architect as a little bit like a movie director. There are different kinds of directors. Some write the thing, act in it, direct, and all of this.

Riess: And you would say that the architect's role is closest to that?

DeMars: No, but some would be this way. Others would be--I doubt that Walter Gropius himself was a really particularly versatile designer. He was a theoretician, and he had around him the people who maybe did it. Breuer, of course, was a younger man.

The thing is that among some of the movie producer-directors the actor is one of their tools in the production. They can bring this out. He has to have his own skills. The architect in many cases is this way. You have a picture in your own mind, an effect you want or something that can be achieved, and you explain it. Maybe you've made some sketches, and you have a guy who you feel is in rapport with the sort of thing you do. Then you go and look at it, and you say, "No, that's not what I mean. Why don't we do this such-and-such?" Well, then he tries that for you. In a big office, obviously, when you're doing one thing, you wouldn't be doing another. These things all have to be going.

There are some people who want to do it all. One of them is Jack Hillmer. I told you he redid a house that Wurster had done for a couple of guys up on Russian Hill. It's marvelous, because he was involved in every bit of it.

Riess: Well, to continue with that analogy, how do you see yourself? Are you a one-man show?

DeMars: Well, no, I don't think I am, but at times I can be. At times I enjoy that role. Sometimes it's almost after the fact, as it has been on the student center, where I've done everything from doorknobs to the signs. I designed the banner that the ASUC uses.

Riess: Now, in a way, you've become the historian of the building. This is what has struck me since I've met you, and since we started on the oral history. I don't know when you get up in the morning, but you seem to be busy all day long in a role as protector and historian of buildings that you were involved with as designer.

DeMars: Well, only to this extent--. I would like to get this in, and [laughs] here I'm not quite making the comparison, but Thomas Jefferson was an architect as well as he had been president, and wasn't he ambassador to France, I believe, at one time? All these great things he had done. He did a little bit of architecture along the way, but the University of Virginia was his hobby. In his last years he did Monticello, but he did lay out the university. [knock at door]

I remember seeing at MIT a bound collection of most of his extant drawings. I think probably several universities had them. It had discussions in it, had letters and so forth. He designed the curtains for Monticello. He was very inventive--perhaps you're familiar with this--about little detail devices. Of course, he was a classicist, but he modified this classicism just a little bit. One of the things was--you know what a double-hung window is, of course.

Riess: Yes, but I don't want to go into details. You got started on this I think because you were saying that your own passion for the University of California is similar?

DeMars: I was trying to say that he, apparently, in his last years, was dedicated to getting the University of Virginia built following this plan. He wrote to other architects and asked them for designs. He wanted an example of each of the orders of architecture: would they send a sketch of a version of this house using the Doric, the Ionic? He used these. He was drawing on this, but he was putting together all these parts and pieces.

He even designed the serpentine wall, one brick thick. He writes to his contractor--I'm just going to introduce this one--to put the roof on part of the wings of Monticello, and they've been waiting to get this bending machine from France. He writes this letter and says, "This is intolerable. We have been waiting for months. If you were to just follow this sketch that I've made, you can do it quite simply yourself." [chuckles]

I've decided to concentrate on the student center as a thing that I think I can have some impact on. It's not that I'm following, like a mother hen every other project that I've been involved in, particularly when I see that it's to no avail or that it's beyond my influence. In fact, my feeling about Wurster Hall is that it's more Esherick and Olsen's than it is mine, as a concept. Let them work it out. And I'm not trying to rescue the Golden Gateway at this stage.

Now, Old Sacramento is another one, to the extent that I'm interested in it historically. Again, there's not much I can do about it other than I gave them some money to try to not have a seventeen-story building built right on the edge of it. But I'm not trying to stick my finger in that pie.

Riess: Or that dike.

DeMars: Or that dike, right. And I'm not trying to find, "What shall I do today?"

There are a couple of other things on campus that I'm still involved in. I'd like to get this glockenspiel done. I would like to get the management of the whole student center in some kind of organizational hands where it is not like sort of a rundown shopping center in Milpitas. I now get the impression that the administration says, "Thank God that's off our neck. If the students want to run it, let them run it." They let them do almost anything. They hardly draw the line anyplace of what they're allowed to get away with. And here I am talking about architecturally.

Transcribers: E. Eshleman, S. Page, N. Yamada

Final Typists: M. Proffitt, S. Riess

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October, 1973

H

CURRICULUM VITAE

VERNON A. DEMARS

Education

A.B., University of California (1931)
Three medals for architectural projects.
Special prize in design under John Galen Howard.

Pre-Professional

Member of Monument Valley-Rainbow Bridge expedition. Made measured drawings of the Twin Caves Cliff Ruins in Tsegi Canyon for the Museum of Arizona, 1934.

Governmental Service

- 1936 Architectural Draftsman, Resettlement Administration
- 1937-43 District Architect, Farm Security Administration.
Responsible for design of 40 Farm Workers' Communities in the Western States, including seasonal and permanent housing, schools, clinics, hospitals, farm buildings and site development.
- 1943-44 Chief of Housing Standards Section, Technical Division, National Housing Agency, Washington, D.C.
- 1952 Architectural Consultant for 8 months to the Mutual Security Agency (U.S. State Department) on housing for miners in the Ruhr, Germany.

FOREIGN TRAVEL AND SUBJECT OF STUDY

June-November, 1938

Europe

First experience in visiting the important architectural monuments of Western culture in England, France, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Holland, Sweden, Finland, Hungary.

1943-1945, 1961, 1963

Carribean

Navy duty and civilian observation or professional responsibility in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

March-October, 1952

Europe

Stationed in Essen, Germany on Marshall Plan Housing program—also traveled to England, France, Holland, Switzerland, and Spain.

June-July, 1955

Europe

Attended seminar on housing and planning in Ischia, Italy. Later traveled through Italy, Denmark, and Sweden, studying particularly housing and new towns.

December-January, 1957

Mexico

First visit to Mexico City, Taxco, and Oaxaca. Interested equally in modern housing and Pre-Columbian cultures.

june-July, 1961

Europe

Attended international conference on theater technology. Later studied new and old theaters in Denmark and Germany.

September-October, 1964

Europe

First opportunity to visit Greece and the Aegean Islands. Traveled also in Italy, France, and England.

August-September, 1965

Japan

Comprehensive architectural study tour.

August-October, 1966

Europe

Associate tour guide through Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Denmark. Separate visit to Finland to see new town of Tapiola.

ACADEMIC CAREER

Teaching

- 1947-49 Visiting Professor in Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Alternated spring and fall semesters with Alvar Aalto.--
- 1951-52 Lecturer in Architecture, University of California, Berkeley.
- 1953-63 Professor of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley. My academic and teaching records for this period are not very detailed. I taught a graduate design studio with Eric Mendlesohn when I first joined the faculty in 1951. I taught at all levels in the years following, from the graduate "thesis" problems of that time down to basic design for incoming freshman. I also taught courses in Graphics: freehand drawing, water color and pen and ink rendering.
- 1963-66 Since 1965 I have carried a 1/2 time teaching load, i.e. one design course. From 1963 through the spring of 1966 I have taught Architecture 201 (formerly Architecture 103), which was intended to give the student an experience in large scale site planning, housing, and aspects of Urban Design. Architecture 103 required the prerequisites of the City Planning course CRP 100 and of Architecture 100A, B and C.
- 1967-73 During this period I have continued with a half-time teaching load, carrying one design studio course each quarter. Except for the winter and spring of 1972 when I taught an undergraduate course, Architecture 102C, my major responsibility has been at the graduate level: Architecture 201, dealing with the history, design, and production of housing. The course as I have offered it includes a weekly illustrated lecture reviewing the gamut of possibilities, historical and contemporary, for housing solutions. Also included are one or more field trips in the Bay Area. Guest lecturers present sociological, technological, and environmental (landscape) aspects of the problem. At the same time, the students design a housing development (usually an actual problem on a real site for approximately 100 families).

I have served on a number of master's thesis committees of students in both Architecture and City Planning.

Special studies students (199's) have averaged one or two per quarter during this period.

ACADEMIC CAREER (continued)Committee ServiceDepartmental and University

- 1951-53 Dean's Executive Committee; Chairman, Exhibitions Committee; Curriculum Committee.
- 1954-58 Dean's Advisory Committee; Chairman, Research Committee; Building Committee.
- 1957 Co-chairman (with Jack Kent) of a committee to establish the College of Environmental Design and to draft the legislation for Academic Senate approval.
- 1959-62 Chairman, Department of Architecture.
- 1960-73 Many Ad Hoc promotion committees of the Academic Senate, chairman of a few.

Advisory Committee to the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research, 1964-66.

Chancellor's Ad Hoc Search Committee, 1963, 1966, for major appointments.

Speaker at Annual Awards Ceremony, Architecture Court, June 1964.

Committee on Department of Design (Chairman of Subcommittee), 1966.

Representative, Field of Architecture, Davis Conference on Arts and Humanities in the University, April 1966.

Faculty member, Student Union Program and Facilities Board, 1968-70.

Speaker for California Alumni Association's "University Night," September 1968. Subject: "The University's New Auditorium Theater."

Chairman, Search Committee for Departmental Chairman, November 1970.

Member of Faculty Public Relations Committee (Littlejohn, Chairman), winter, spring 1971.

ACADEMIC CAREER (continued)Committee ServiceDepartmental and University

Chairman or member of several Ad Hoc departmental promotion committees.

Faculty representative from Architecture Department, Alumni House "Career Day," April 1972.

Architecture Department representative on College of Environmental Design Executive Committee, 1972-74.

The following activities were performed as an interested member of the University community rather than as part of the contract for architectural services for the Student Center:

Managed disbursement of the Prytanean Fund, a grant of \$2,000 to Zellerbach Hall for the furnishing of the Green Room and the Playhouse lobby. Selected drapes, furniture, etc., 1970-72.

Designed or consulted on numerous items in the student Center such as signs (Bowling, Shoe Shine, barber pole), poster boards, general graphics, display walls, re-construction of the kiosks, installation of art works, etc., 1965-72.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Principal in firm of DeMars and Wells, Architects.

Corporate member, American Institute of Architects.

Member, Northern California Chapter of the A.I.A.

Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, 1964.

Registered in California, Oregon, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Colorado.

Member of Lambda Alpha, Honorary Society for Land Economics.

Member of A.C.S.A., NCARB.

Founding Member of "TELESIS," city and regional planning organization (predecessor of S.P.U.R.) in San Francisco, 1940.

CONSULTING SERVICES TO GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

Architectural consultant to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency on master planning and urban design concepts for Diamond Heights and the Western Addition, 1951.

Consultant to the city of Fremont on central area planning, 1960.

Consultant to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on housing programs and policy, 1962.

Consultant to the City of Berkeley on urban renewal of South Campus area, 1964-65.

Member of Advisory Board for the Low Income Housing Demonstration Program of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, Washington, D.C., 1963-66.

Participant and panelist at Asilomar Conference on Environmental Beauty (sponsored by H.H.F.A. September 1965).

Member of National Design Awards Jury, H.U.D., Washington, D.C., August 1966.

Urban Design Consultant to the City of Oakland on 701 Project, 1967-68.

Member of Architectural Advisory Panel for the General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. 1967-69.

Special urban design study and report to the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency on the Old Sacramento Historic Area, June 1968.

Consultant to the City of Walnut Creek on master plan and urban design concepts for their City Hall and Civic Center, 1969.

Architectural member of task force advising City of Baltimore on development of Inner Harbor, part of the Charles Center Redevelopment Plan, 1969-70.

Architectural consultant to site planners for HUD's "Operation Breakthrough" suburban project in Seattle, 1970-71.

Continuing as architectural consultant to the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency on the restoration of Old Sacramento, 1971-73.

Planning consultant to Public Housing Administration and Bureau of Indian Affairs on development of community plans and housing for Oglala Sioux at Pine Ridge, S.D.

COMMITTEE AND PUBLIC SERVICE (Professional)

Shared responsibility for planning, design and installation of TELESIS exhibition, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1940.

Contributor to exhibition, "Tomorrow's Small House," Museum of Modern Art, New York, May-September, 1945.

Design and Installation of Exhibition: "Program and Works of the Comite para Disegno de Obras Publicas," San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1945.

Education Committee of the A.I.A., Washington, D.C., 1952-54.

Chairman, A.I.A. Committee for Resolution of "The Freeway Problem and the Ferry Building Part," San Francisco, 1952-54.

Member of House Beautiful Annual Awards Jury, New York, 1956.

Member of Coppers Co. National Awards Jury, New York, 1959.

Member, Advisory Committee on Urban Design, A.I.A. Journal, Washington, D.C. 1963-64.

Member of Jury for S.F. Players Guild national competition for sets and designs for a new play, April 1964.

Member of Regional Awards Jury, Texas Society of Architects, Dallas, Texas, August 1964.

Member of Reynolds Aluminum International Award Jury, Washington, D.C., March 1965.

A.I.A. National Committee on Collaborating Arts, 1966.

Associate tour conductor, U.C. Alumni European tour, August-September 1966. Several informal lectures on architectural history to group.

Appointed Trustee of San Francisco Museum of Art, 1966 to present. Currently member of its Building Committee and the Program and Policy Board.

Member of Ad Hoc committee of project architects for BARDT advising on replacement of Consultant Architect activity, November 1966.

Member of Jury, Central Valley Chapter A.I.A. Honor Awards, September 1969.

Member of Jury, Walnut Creek Action for Beauty Council Awards Program, October 1969.

COMMITTEE AND PUBLIC SERVICE (Professional)

Member of Visiting Committee of the National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc. for evaluation of Princeton's Architecture Department, November 1971.

Member, Design Awards Jury, Portland Chapter, A.I.A., June 1972.

Member of First Annual Awards Jury for the Sea Ranch, October 1972.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LECTURES, FORUMS AND CONFERENCES

"Relationship of Technological and Social Research in Housing"
Remarks at Symposium: "Frontiers of Housing Research," University
of Wisconsin, September 1948.

"Urban Rationalization," Paper at A.I.A. national convention in
Chicago, Ill. May 1951.

Address at Alberta Chapter Convention of Canadian Institute of
Architects, Edmonton, Alberta, June 1953.

AIA-KPFA Lecture Series on Cities, San Francisco, January 1954.

U.S. Representative (Group of 10) to Seminar on Housing and Planning
in Ischia, Italy, 1955.

Member, Planning Committee and participant in A.I.A.—A.C.S.A.
Teaching Seminar, Aspen, Colorado, 1957.

Round Table on Rental Housing, sponsored by Time/Fortune, Pittsburgh,
January 1958.

Participant in A.I.A.—A.C.S.A. Seminar, Nantucket, 1958.

"Tomorrow's Cities, Plan or Chaos," panel discussion sponsored by
Time, Inc. at Mt. Holyoke College, March 1959.

Speaker, American Institute of Planners National Convention, "Design
and Urban Character," Seattle, Washington, 1959.

"Public Housing: The Problem and Some Proposals," Governor's Housing
Conference, Los Angeles, June 1960.

"The Future of Public Housing," University of California, Extension
Division, "Seminar on Urban Renewal: The Next Big Tasks,"
San Francisco, March 1959.

Participant, Americans for Democratic Action Conference on Housing
(Edward Eichler, Chairman), Palo Alto, January 1961.

Member, U.S. Delegation of U.S.I.T.T. to Conference of International
Institute of Theater Technicians, London, 1961.

Speaker, Governor's Conference on problems of Growth in California,
San Francisco, June 1962.

Speaker at convention of Architects and Engineers (Collegios) of
Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico, May 1964.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LECTURES, FORUMS AND CONFERENCES

Lecture: "The Architect and the Environment," Ohio State University, May 1964.

Lecture: "Who's Afraid of Environmental Design," Long Beach Jr. College, November 1965.

Lecture: "The Look of the City," Stanford Alumni Association, San Francisco, October 1966.

Participant in Regional Conference of the A.I.A. Address at annual banquet, "What Price Design?" Birmingham, Alabama, December 1966.

Moderator for Alvar Aalto's "Discussions" in Berkeley, San Francisco and Mt. Angel, Oregon, April 1967.

Statement to National Commission on Urban Problems, Senator Paul Douglas, Chairman, July 1967.

Speaker, "Engineering for People" Conference, Oakland, September 1967.

Participant, Theater Conference, College of Marin, January 1968.

Participant at Society for College and University Planning Conference at Louisville, Kentucky, August 1968.

Panelist at Symposium on Art and the Environment, Mills College, November 1968.

Lecture on Performing Arts Center at 11 Cenocolo, San Francisco, March 1971.

Participant in Symposium "Architecture of the Northwest," Mount Angel Abbey, April 1971.

Lecture on the Berkeley Student Center at California Polytechnic Institute, July 1971.

Participant, symposium on land use, Walnut Creek, January 1972.

Lecture, "Taos Revisited" at the Arts Club, University of California, April 1972.

Illustrated presentation of Zellerbach Hall at U.S. Institute of Theater Technicians National Conference in San Francisco, July 1972.

Lecture, "The San Francisco City Hall" for the San Francisco Historical Society's tour at the City Hall, November 1972.

PUBLICATION (Authorship)

Articles, Statements, or Reports

"Social Planning for Western Agriculture," article in Task magazine, Summer 1941.

"Look Homeward, Housing!" article in Architectural Record, April 1946.

"Letter from Berlin," A.I.A. Journal, Nov. (?) 1952.

"German Coal Miners' Housing Program," 2nd Progress Report, October 1952.

*"Housing for Low Income Families: An Alternative to the Present Public Housing Program," Architectural Forum, April 1957.

"Housing in Puerto Rico," Report to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on Housing Programs and Policies, May 1961.

"USITT Report for E.F.L.," 1961, 3rd Biennial Conference on Theater Technology, London, June 1961.

Reply to Allen Temki's critique of the Berkeley Student Center, Architectural Forum, October 1961.

"Ocean Park Towers," Proposal for Perini Corp. to the Redevelopment Agency of Santa Monica, California 1961.

"The Peoples Architects," Rice University Centennial Publication, edited by Harry Ransom, University of Chicago Press, 1964.
(Architects discuss the nature of architecture today.)

"Urban Design and the Great Exhibitions," Daily Pacific Builder at CCAIA Convention, San Diego, 1967.

*James William Gaynor, Commissioner of Housing and Community Renewal for New York State, credited this proposal with being instrumental in setting up the low income financing experiment with "rent supplements" in New York State. This concept was later incorporated into federal law. (See letter)

PUBLICATION (By others)

Articles and reviews or assessments of the work of DeMars as an individual; of the Western Office of the Farm Security Administration under DeMars as Regional, then District Architect (1937-1942); of DeMars and Reay (1955-1966), and of DeMars and Wells (1966-present).

"Die Neve Architectur," by Alfred Roth. Pub.: Girstberger, Zurich, Switzerland, 1940 (20 examples of the new architecture selected internationally. The F.S.A. housing in Chandler, Arizona was included)

"Work of the F.S.A.," Architectural Forum, January 1941. A review of the work (almost exclusively from the Western Office) of the Farm Security Administration.

"Farm Security Architecture," by Talbot Hamlin, Pencil Points (later Progressive Architecture), November 1941. An appraisal of the work of the San Francisco Office of the F.S.A.

"F.S.A. Medical Programs," New Pencil Points, December 1942.

"The Story of Vallejo," California Arts & Architecture, June 1943, pp. 33-37, F.S.A. War Housing Dining and Recreational Facilities.

"Fort Drive Gardens," Architectural Forum, October 1943. A post-war community proposal for 1,000 families, Washington, D.C.

"Good Neighbors," by Richard Pratt, Ladies Home Journal, April 1944. A design for post war row houses built as large scale models (1" = 1') and photographed.

"Plans for a Cooperative Balanced Community," The American City, February 1947. Zoning problems of Bannockbarn near Washington, D.C., Burket, Neufeld and DeMars architects.

"Eastgate Apartments as a New Plan Type," Architectural Record, February 1949. A preconstruction assessment of 100 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, Mass.

"Boston Builds Balconies," Architectural Forum, May 1951. Photo review and critique of 100 Memorial Drive.

"The Private House, Berkeley, California," Architectural Record, May 1955. Review of DeMars Residence.

"Easter Hill Village: The Case for the Row House," House and Home, July 1955.

One Hundred Years of Architecture in America, 1857-1957; Celebrating the Centennial of the American Institute of Architects, by Frederick Gutheim, New York, Rheinhold, 1957. Easter Hill Village included in section: "Ten Buildings in America's Future." 100 Memorial Drive apartments included in chapter: "Trends in Recent Years."

Student Union Buildings, University of California, Berkeley, Architectural Record, August 1957.

Row Patio Houses, Richmond, California, House and Home, October 1957.

Residential Development, Richmond, California, Architectural Record, November 1957.

Redevelopment, Marin City, California, Progressive Architecture, January 1960.

Redevelopment, Marin City, Case-Study Seminar, Progressive Architecture, November 1960.

"Golden Gateway Redevelopment Evaluation Report," California Arts and Architecture, November 1960.

Student Center, University of California, Berkeley, article by A. Temko, Progressive Architecture, October 1961, Architectural Forum.

Apartment Development, Santa Monica, California, Progressive Architecture, October 1961.

Apartment Development, Santa Monica, California, Architectural Record January 1962.

"Neues Wohngebiet in Santa Monica, Kalifornien," Baumeister, Munich, June 1962.

"Projecto de remodelacao do Golden Gateway (S. Francisco), Binario Setembro 1962 (Portugal)

"Projet d'aménagement d'une zone residential a Santa Monica, California, Architecture d'aujourd'hui, Paris 1962.

Townhouses, Minority Housing, Richmond, California, House & Home, February 1965.

Shinkenchiku (Japan Architect) August 1965. Critical review of the U.C. Student Center and the background work of V. DeMars.

Auditorium Theater Building, University of California, Berkeley, Progressive Architecture, October 1965.

COMPETITIONS

Competitions won and projects built:

Student Center, Berkeley, California.

Golden Gateway, San Francisco, California.

Marin City Urban Renewal, California.

Capitol Towers, Sacramento, California.

"The Plaza" Redevelopment, Richmond, California.

Other Competitions entered:

Residence Halls, Berkeley, California.

Lawrence Hall of Science, Berkeley, California.

Santa Monica Urban Renewal.

Replan of Cathedral Precinct, Cologne, Germany.

Sidney Opera House.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY (Professional)

While teaching at M.I.T., an architectural team was commissioned to design a twelve story building for faculty housing:

Eastgate Apartments, 100 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Brown, Kennedy, DeMars, Rapson and Koch, Architects. Completed in 1950. Responsibility: Rapson 35%, DeMars 25%, Kennedy 20%, Koch 15%, Brown 5%.

On returning to California, a joint venture was formed to plan and build:

Easter Hill Village, Richmond, California. Hardison and DeMars, Architects. 300 family public housing project. Completed in 1954. DeMars responsible for design, Hardison for production.

After joining the Berkeley faculty, the following projects represent the main professional activity conducted under the partnership of DeMars and Reay through 1965, subsequently DeMars and Wells. In some cases these involve association or joint ventures with other architects. In each case the degree and kind of responsibility is identified.

Student Center, University of California, Berkeley. Hardison and DeMars, Architects. This complex consists of four major buildings surrounding a pedestrian plaza built over a parking structure for 120 cars. The project was awarded to the architects as the result of an invited competition, received the Progressive Architecture "Design Award" in 1958 and the HHFA "First Honor Award" in 1964. While "Hardison and DeMars" are the architects of record, the firm of DeMars and Reay was in fact one-half of the joint venture with Hardison and Komatsu the other. DeMars was in overall charge of design, assisted by Reay. Policy decisions were shared by all. In detail:

Student Union and Dining Commons including:
Cafeteria, restaurant, dining terrace, food preparation facilities, ballroom to accommodate 1000 persons, meeting rooms, ASUC Book Store, and a 16 lane bowling alley. Completed in 1961.

Eshleman Hall, Student office building for the Student Government, publications, and offices of the ASUC, Berkeley. Completed in 1965 from original competition design. (Working Drawings and supervision: Hardison 90%, DeMars 10%.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY (Professional) [continued]

Auditorium-Theater (Zellerbach Hall), a 2,000 seat multipurpose auditorium and a 500 to 700 seat adaptable experimental playhouse, with all supporting facilities. Vernon DeMars and Donald Hardison, Architects, a residual association from the Student Center competition. By joint agreement, DeMars and Wells were made completely responsible for design, working drawings, and supervision (DeMars 95% and Hardison 5%). Construction started in fall, 1965; completed in spring, 1969.

Capitol Towers Garden Apartments, Sacramento Mall Urban Renewal Project, Sacramento, California. Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons, Edward L. Barnes, and DeMars and Reay, Architects. A four block landscaped apartment development near the Capitol, which received Progressive Architecture's "First Design Award" in 1958. The first group of low rise apartments was completed in 1958 and the first high rise tower was completed in 1965. Equal responsibility with other principals for original competition design. Various responsibilities in latter phases, with minimum involvement in high rise.

Marin City Redevelopment, Marin City, California. DeMars and Reay, Architects for the master plan and completed phases of construction. The project was awarded Progressive Architecture's "First Design Award" in 1960. Construction is proceeding in several phases; 100 apartments and 100 single family houses were completed by 1965. Responsibility for design shared with partners.

The College of Environmental Design (Wurster Hall) University of California, Berkeley. DeMars, Esherick and Olsen, Architects. Completed in 1965. Equal responsibility with associates for original design concept, general form, planning and siting. Esherick responsible for design decisions in developmental phases.

Emerson Elementary School, Berkeley, California. DeMars and Reay and W.T. Willer, Architects. Completed in 1965. Reay, partner in charge of design.

Wells Fargo Bank, El Cerrito Branch. DeMars and Reay, Architects. Completed in 1965. DeMars, partner in charge of design.

Sonoma County Court House and Jail. Clarence Felciano, Architect. DeMars and Reay, Associated Architects. Completed in 1965. Reay, partner in charge.

Hamilton New Town, near San Jose, California. A joint venture of DeMars and Wells, Architects; Livingston and Blayney, Planners; and Lawrence Halprin, Landscape Architect. Master plan for a new town of 100,000 population to be built by Oceanic Properties, Inc., around Lake Anderson. 1965. Housing studies and site analysis 1966.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY (Professional) (continued)

Columbia Plaza, Washington, D.C. Keyes, Lethbridge, and Condon, and DeMars and Reay, Architects. A redevelopment project consisting of high rise apartments, maisonettes, a hotel, and a parking structure. Construction started in 1965. (Responsibility K.L. & C. 65%, Reay 20%, DeMars 15%).

The Golden Gateway Redevelopment Project, San Francisco, California. Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons, and DeMars and Reay, Architects. A development of apartments and townhouses, raised on plazas above commercial and parking facilities. Phase I, two blocks completed in 1965. Phase II, one block completed in 1966. Shared responsibility with other principals for competition scheme. Responsible for detailed design and working drawings of two point towers and one group of town houses.

Library for Mount Angel Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Oregon. DeMars, American associate for Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. Completed in 1970. From schematic designs prepared in Finland, DeMars and Wells carried the project through preliminaries, working drawings, and supervision of construction. Design concept is 100% Aalto; interpretation and detailing for American construction the responsibility of DeMars and Wells, who are the "Architects of Record" according to Oregon law.

Library and Classroom buildings for the California College of Arts & Crafts, Oakland, California. DeMars and Reay, Architects. Construction completed 1968. (DeMars personal responsibility approximately 20%, Reay 60%, Wells 20%.)

Cutting and Fairmont Stations, El Cerrito, California, for the Bay Area Rapid Transit District. DeMars and Reay, Architects. Construction completed in 1971.

Grattan Elementary School, San Francisco, California. DeMars and Wells, Architects. Two-story concrete block and reinforced concrete construction. Twenty-two classrooms and ancillary facilities. Construction completed in 1971. (DeMars, partner in charge of design; Richard Stark, designer and job captain.)

Oakland 701 Projects. Consultants to the Oakland Redevelopment Agency for the development of a city-wide urban design guide, 1968. Jack T. Sidener, AIP, associate in charge. (Responsibility: Sidener 80%, DeMars 20%.)

Walnut Creek Civic Center. Master planning, followed by several construction phases to provide city administrative offices, county court facilities, police facilities, parking, performing arts facilities, exhibition space and art instruction space. Master planning phase currently being reviewed by City. DeMars and Wells, Architects.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY (Professional) (continued)

Historic Old Sacramento Waterfront Area Redevelopment. In 1963 DeMars and Reat in association with Candeb Fleissig and Associates prepared a plan for the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency for the restoration and use of several blocks of historic old buildings, dating from the Gold Rush days. In 1968 DeMars and Wells were retained to prepare an Urban Design Plan with recommendations for details of the restoration; street and sidewalk paving, lighting, colors, street furniture, signing, parking and traffic policies. DeMars in charge, Robert D. Hill, associate and job captain. (Responsibility: DeMars 75%, Hill 25%.) In 1972 the contract was extended to provide continuing consultation as actual reconstruction progresses. (Responsibility: DeMars 100%.)

Mililani New Town, Oahu, Hawaii. In 1962 a joint venture of DeMars and Reay, Architects; Livingston & Blayney, Planners; and Lawrence Halprin & Associates, Landscape Architects, prepared a master plan for a new town of 60,000 population to be built by Oceanic Properties, Inc., on property situated between Pearl Harbor and Schofield Barracks. In 1966 DeMars and Wells were commissioned to design first production houses and a sales pavilion. DeMars partner in charge of planning and house designs. By 1972 1,200 of the original 6 house designs have been built. Population of Mililani now exceeds 10,000.

Wheeler Hall, Auditorium Redevelopment. DeMars and Wells, Architects. Redesign and rebuilding of the 1,000 seat auditorium destroyed by fire. Completion scheduled in mid-1973. (DeMars in charge of design.)

College Union, California State University, Sacramento. DeMars and Wells, Architects. Three-story reinforced concrete structure, about 60,000 sq. ft. gross building area. Construction to start spring of 1973. (DeMars, partner in charge of design.)

San Francisco Performing Arts Center, Civic Center, San Francisco. DeMars and Wells, Architects. Feasibility and site utilization study for a 2,700 seat concert hall to be the new home of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, plus rehearsal facilities for San Francisco Opera, plaza, restaurants, etc. In design stage, 1972. (DeMars wholly responsible for plan and conceptual design.)

Aster Park, Sunnyvale. DeMars and Wells, Architects. A moderate income housing development for 95 families in 2 and 3 story town houses and apartments. Ready for working drawings and construction in 1973. (DeMars in charge of design.)

AWARDS

The Parker Medal of the City of Boston, awarded for Eastgate Apartments, 100 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951. Brown, Kennedy, DeMars, Rapson, and Koch, Architects.

100 Memorial Drive, Eastgate Apartments, included in 50 Significant Buildings of "A Century of Architecture," by Architectural Record, 1957.

American Institute of Architects Regional Award of Merit for the DeMars Residence, 240 The Uplands, Berkeley, California, 1957. Vernon DeMars, Architect.

Easter Hill Village, one of "10 Buildings in America's Future" at the AIA Centennial, Washington, D.C. 1957. Included in an exhibition sent to the USSR, 1958. Hardison and DeMars, Architects.

Progressive Architecture's one of five national "Design Awards" for the Student Center, University of California, Berkeley, 1958. Hardison and DeMars, Architects.

Progressive Architecture national "First Design Award" for Capitol Towers Garden Apartments, Sacramento Mall, Urban Renewal Project, Sacramento, California, 1959. Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, Edward L. Barnes, and DeMars and Reay, Architects.

Progressive Architecture national "First Design Award" for Marin City Redevelopment, Marin City, California, 1960. DeMars and Reay, Architects.

Sunset Magazine "Special Award" in the Western Homes Awards program for the Plaza Redevelopment, Richmond, California, 1959. Hardison and DeMars, Architects.

Urban Renewal Administration "First Honor Award" for Capitol Towers Garden Apartments, Sacramento Mall, Urban Renewal Project, Sacramento, California, 1964. Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, Edward L. Barnes, and DeMars and Reay, Architects.

American Institute of Architects "Merit Award" for Capitol Towers, Sacramento, California, 1963. DeMars and Reay, Architects.

Community Facilities Administration "First Honor Award" for University of California Student Center, Berkeley, California, 1964. Hardison and DeMars, Architects.

AWARDS (continued)

Public Housing Administration "Special Commendation" for Easter Hill Village, Richmond, California, 1964. Hardison and DeMars, Architects.

American Institute of Architects in cooperation with House and Home and Life Magazines "Award of Merit" for "The Plaza," Richmond, California, 1960. Hardison and DeMars, Architects.

Governor's Design Awards, State of California, 1966. Certificate of Excellence for Capitol Towers.

Governor's Design Awards, State of California, 1966. Certificate of Excellence for Student Union, University of California, Berkeley.

Bay Area Awards Program, Northern California Chapter of American Institute of Architects, 1967: Award of Merit for Wurster Hall.

American Institute of Architects in cooperation with House and Home and Life Magazines, 1962. Honorable Mention for Marin City.

HUD Award for El Cerrito Plaza and El Cerrito Del Norte Rapid Transit Stations, 1968.

American Society of Landscape Architects Award for El Cerrito Plaza and El Cerrito Del Norte Rapid Transit Stations, 1970.

American Society of Landscape Architects Award for Mililani New Town, 1971.

San Francisco Planning & Urban Renewal Association Award for Environmental Quality for The Golden Gateway, 1972.

Appendix

VERNON DEMARS

Supporting Documents in The
Bancroft LibraryMiscellaneous papers

Xeroxed notes from Seattle's mayor to Major General Funston, San Francisco, regarding the Willis family following 1906 San Francisco earthquake, two pages.

Poster from International House Indian dance presentation, 6 February 1932; review of show in Daily Californian.

Binder of selected papers, letters, speeches, and reports, assembled by DeMars:

"The New Architecture at Mid-Century," remarks given at the Convention of the Alberta Institute of Architects, Edmonton, Canada, 1954.

"Look Homeward, Housing!" from the Architectural Record, April 1946.

Letter to Catherine Wurster, 21 July 1952.

"German Coal Miners' Housing Program, Second Progress Report," 17 October 1952.

"Housing in Puerto Rico: some observations on the past, present and future of the commonwealth's housing problems," May 1961.

"Housing for Low Income Families: An Alternative to the Present Public Housing Program." Invited commentary on "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," by Catherine Bauer, Architectural Forum, May 1957.

"Design and Urban Character," remarks for panel discussion on "The Form and Appearance of the Metropolitan Region" at the A.I.P. conference, 28 July 1959.

"Urban Design and the Great Exhibitions," paper for Daily Pacific Builder, at the CCAIA Convention, San Diego, 1967.

"Statement to National Commission on Urban Problems," 6 July 1967.

Eastgate Apartments, Architectural Record's Building Types Study Number 1946, February 1949.

"People's Architecture: The Urban Environment," lecture by Vernon DeMars at Rice University award, March 1963.

"On the Unique Humanism of Alvar Aalto" by Vernon DeMars; with Architectural Record article, "Aalto's Second American Building: An Abbey Library for a Hillside in Oregon," May 1971; xeroxes of two photographs of the abbey library.

Chapter on Vernon DeMars from book on architecture.

"Local Architects Cited Among 40 Best in the Nation," Berkeley Daily Gazette, 4 July 1957.

Vernon DeMars' response to gun lobby, February 16, 1989.

Farm Security Administration

"Western Agriculture," from TASK 2, 1941.

Four photographs from U.S.D.A. Farm Security Administration scrapbook: the Problem (2), Duration Dormitories, Prefabrication. Four xeroxed pages from scrapbook, 30 June 1943.

Other Public Housing

Fort Drive Gardens, Fortune magazine, October 1943.

"Mixed Rental Neighborhood, Washington" [Fort Drive Gardens], Architectural Forum, 1943.

Letter from Group Housing Cooperative of Washington to Edmund Gilchrist, 28 May 1946.

"Tugwell's Contribution," The San Juan [Puerto Rico] Outlook, July 7, 1991.

TASK magazine [Gift of Warren Radford, A.I.A.] issues 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7/8.

"P/A [Progressive Architecture] Seventh Annual Design Awards: First Design Award for Redevelopment of Marin City, California," January 1960.

UC Berkeley Architecture

"The Winning Design in a Competition for a Student Center on the Berkeley Campus for the University of California," Hardison & DeMars, 15 pp.

Critique of UC Berkeley Student Center by Allan Temko, and reply by Vernon DeMars, Architectural Forum, October 1961.

"About the Banners..." designed by Betty DeMars for the Grand Foyer of Zellerbach Hall; Zellerbach Auditorium.

Drawing by DeMars of East Elevation of Eshleman Hall, with proposed glockenspiel.

"Sproul as Political Space" and "The Campus in the Community," Berkeley Graduate, January 1981.

Xerox photograph of Sproul Plaza.

"Reflections on the Founding: Wurster Hall and the College of Environmental Design," by Sally Woodbridge, Places, 1984.

Berkeley Art Project Competition Announcement [site-specific work to be created on Sproul Plaza to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Free Speech Movement...] 1984.

Embarcadero Freeway, San Francisco

"The Embarcadero Freeway vs. The Ferry Building Park," selected correspondence and news clippings from August 1955 to December 1957.

Recent Correspondence:

DeMars to Supervisor Carol Ruth Silver, 25 October 1985.

Theodore Osmundson to Supervisor John Molinari, 1 November 1985.

Gray Brechin to DeMars, 16 February 1986.

DeMars to Brechin, 6 March 1986.

"Demolishing the Embarcadero Freeway," by Gray Brechin, KQED Focus magazine, January 1986.

"A Sense of Vision," Citizens Committee for the Removal of the Embarcadero Elevated Freeway.

Miscellaneous newspaper articles relating to the Embarcadero redesign, 1992.

Golden Gateway, San Francisco

San Francisco Redevelopment Agency Architectural Advisory Panel response to design for Golden Gateway submitted by Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, and DeMars & Reay.

Francis Violich

Letter from Violich to Vernon DeMars re Betty Bates DeMars Memorial, Sept. 5, 1987.

Letter from Violich to Michael Harris regarding Embarcadero redesign, San Francisco Chronicle, June 15, 1992.

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Documenting the history of the University of California has been a responsibility of the Regional Oral History Office since the Office was established in 1954. Oral history memoirs with University-related persons are listed below. They have been underwritten by the UC Berkeley Foundation, the Chancellor's Office, University departments, or by extramural funding for special projects. The oral histories, both tapes and transcripts, are open to scholarly use in The Bancroft Library. Bound, indexed copies of the transcripts are available at cost to manuscript libraries.

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November 1992

ARCHITECTS AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

The following interviews relating to architecture and landscape architecture have been completed by the Regional Oral History Office, a division of The Bancroft Library. The office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to the development of California and the West. Transcripts of the interviews, typed, indexed, and bound, may be ordered at cost for deposit in research libraries.

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WURSTER, WILLIAM W. (1895-1973), College of Environmental Design, University of California, Campus Planning, and Architectural Practice. 1964. Founding dean of the College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley, leading architect in the Bay Region style, chief of the firm of Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons, talks about architectural influences and education, practice, specific commissions.

Multi-interview Volumes

BLAKE ESTATE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. 1988. Interviews with family members, architects and landscape architects, gardeners, staff, and two presidents of the University of California to document the history of Blake House, since 1967 the University's presidential residence, and the Blake Garden, a ten-acre horticultural mecca utilized as a teaching facility.

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THOMAS D. CHURCH, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT. Two volumes, 1978. A study of Thomas Dolliver Church (1902-1978), landscape architect, through interviews with colleagues in architecture and landscape architecture, staff, clients and friends, landscape contractors and nurserymen, and with Elizabeth Roberts Church.

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